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In the Shadow of Simferopol's Parks: Crimean Tatars' Return to Their Homeland in the Late 1960s

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to highlight the return of the Crimean Tatars to their homeland in the late 1960s and their struggle for the right to reside in Crimea. The paper examines the Crimean Tatars' visits to Soviet and party authorities in Simferopol, the administrative center of the Crimean region, protest demonstrations, and squatting in public squares and parks. The main goal of the study is to shed light on an underexplored chapter in the history of the Crimean Tatars' return, which took place after the signing of the Decree of 5 IX 1967, issued by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. This article seeks to reconstruct their struggle for the right to return to Crimea in the face of Soviet authorities resistance, using an urban history perspective focused on Simferopol, particularly its central part.

Keywords: Crimea, Crimean Tatars, Simferopol, urban space, return, protest

Introduction

While writing my PhD thesis titled „The Return of Crimean Tatars to the Homeland, 1956-1989”, I encountered challenges in identifying the specific locations in Simferopol where Crimean Tatars gathered, protested, or squatted during their attempts to return to Crimea in the late 1960s. The names of the squares and parks referenced in their narratives changed multiple times, and local historical sources did not provide the clarity I needed. With a surprise I discovered that history of Simferopol, often regarded as the „capital” of Crimea, is frequently overshadowed by the peninsula's renowned resort towns. As a result, Simferopol is either omitted from literature altogether or portrayed in a fragmented manner as

merely a „gateway to Crimea”, serving only as a transient stop for those en route to more idyllic holiday destinations. Post-Soviet-era local literature tends to romanticize the Russian imperial history of Simferopol up to 1917, without paying much attention to its development as an administrative center in the 20th century.

The return of the Crimean Tatars to their homeland during the 1960s and 1970s remains insufficiently addressed in historical scholarship. While the deportation of Crimean Tatars is extensively studied, the post-deportation period primarily centers on the national movement of the Crimean Tatars¹. Although there are comprehensive studies on the topic, they largely situate the return within the broader context of Soviet national movements or dissident activities². A prevailing belief holds that the Crimean Tatar resistance was primarily centered around petition campaigns, with its key activities concentrated in Uzbekistan and Moscow.

Moreover, traditionally, historiography has focused on the mass return (repatriation) of Crimean Tatars that began in 1989 and continued after the dissolution of the USSR. In contrast, the migration back to Crimea in 1960s and 1970s, due to its limited scale, tends to receive little attention from researchers. Furthermore, aspects such as the strategies and tactics of return, as well as everyday forms of resistance, remain underexplored.

Therefore, the goal of this article is to reconstruct the Crimean Tatars’ struggle for the right to return within the context of Simferopol’s urban landscape. Additionally, this article seeks to pinpoint the exact locations where Crimean Tatars gathered and protested, while highlighting, through the lens of local history, the transformation of key urban spaces during this period. The study also holds practical value, as it aims to facilitate future research for scholars interested in this subject.

For this study, I have relied on the work of Volodymyr and Oleh Shyrokov titled „Simferopol: The Streets Tell the Story”³, first published in 1983. This book not only provides a comprehensive local historical overview devoted exclusively to Simferopol but also, given the year of its publication, records the main changes in the city’s urban space in the Soviet post-war period. The research is based on archival documents from the Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine, primarily reports and dispatches from the Chairman of the Committee for State Security (KGB) of the USSR. The article also incorporates published memoirs and interviews conducted by the author through oral history fieldwork.

¹ G. Bekirova, *Piv stolittia oporu: Krymski tatory vid vyhnannia do povernennia (1941-1991 roky): Narys politychnoi istorii*, Kyiv 2017.

² O. Bazhan, Y. Danyliuk, *Opozytsiia v Ukraini (druha polovyna 50-kh – 80-ti rr. XX st.)*, Kyiv 2000.

³ V. Shirokov, O. Shirokov, *Simferopol: Ulitsy rasskazyvayut*, Simferopol 1983.

Simferopol as the Focal Point

In 1956, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR issued a decree that ostensibly released deported Crimean Tatars from special settlements; however, it simultaneously prohibited their return to Crimea and neglected to compensate them for their lost property⁴. Although Crimean Tatars were permitted to reside throughout the Soviet Union, they remained excluded from their homeland, perpetuating their state of exile.

On 5 IX 1967, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet issued a decree titled „On Citizens of Tatar Nationality Who Previously Resided in Crimea”. This decree was intended to fully restore the rights of Crimean Tatars deported in 1944. The first provision stated: „Annul the relevant decisions of state bodies containing indiscriminate accusations against citizens of Tatar nationality previously residing in Crimea”. However, the second provision noted that: „...the Tatars who previously resided in Crimea have become rooted in the territory of Uzbekistan and other Soviet republics, where they enjoy all the rights of Soviet citizens...”⁵.

It was not only the peculiar and awkward phrasing of the decree's title, referring to „citizens of Tatar nationality previously living in Crimea”, that indicated there were deeper issues with this decree. On the same day, the USSR Supreme Council issued an additional resolution stating that „citizens of Tatar nationality previously residing in Crimea” had the right to reside in the territory of the USSR in accordance with „the current legislation on employment and the passport system”⁶. Thus, the return to Crimea, which now seemed unrestricted, was controlled through the registration (resident permit) system. In practice, the registration became the primary obstacle to the return of Crimean Tatars. This meant that newcomers needed to register for a residence permit, for which they were required to have a job. However, without registration they could not apply for employment in the area they wished to live. This vicious circle had been deliberately created to prevent the Crimean Tatars from returning to their homeland.

However, the Crimean Tatars became aware of these obstacles only later. The 5 IX decree provoked the migration of Crimean Tatars back to Crimea. Lyudmila Alexeyeva, referring to the Samizdat archives, pointed out that despite the shortcomings of the decree, Crimean Tatars traveled to Crimea in large families – „including the elderly who dreamed of dying on their native soil and children who had never seen Crimea but had inherited dreams of it from their

⁴ Gosudarstvennyy Arkhiv Rossiyskoy Federatsii (State Archive of the Russian Federation, further: GARF), F-7523, op. 75, d. 675, l. 3.

⁵ GARF, F-7523, op. 91, d. 134, l. 65-66.

⁶ Y. Sigachev, V. Khlopov, I. Shevchuk, *Reabilitatsiia: Kak eto bylo. Dokumenty Prezidiuma TsK KPSS i drugie materialy. T.II: Fevral' 1956 – nachalo 80-kh godov*, Moskva 2003, pp. 517-518.

parents”. From September to the end of 1967, around 6,000 Crimean Tatars arrived in Crimea according to Alekseeva⁷.

A significant aspect of the return process that commenced in September 1967 was the Crimean Tatars’ efforts to engage with local Soviet and party authorities to assert their right to reside within the USSR as stipulated by Soviet law. Thus, for those who chose this legal route of return, Simferopol, the administrative center of the Crimean region, was the first point of entry. In a special report from KGB Chairman Nikitchenko to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine on 27 VIII 1968, it was noted that both active leaders of the national movement and those not involved in it were traveling to Crimea. They collectively visited party and Soviet authorities demanding employment and housing, organized gatherings, conducted local agitation, and set up tent camps⁸. Documents and the memoirs of Crimean Tatars reveal that, in addition to government buildings, gatherings and protests took place in the parks and squares of Simferopol’s central part.

The Crimean Regional Committee of the Party and Komsomol Park

The Crimean Regional Committee of the Party and Komsomol Square became the site for many protests. The regional party committee moved to a new building at 18 Karl Marx Street in early 1989, having previously been located at the District Court building at 14 Gogol Street, built in 1909. In 1918, it housed the Simferopol Council of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, which later transformed into the Revolutionary Committee. From 1934, it became the headquarters for the Crimean Regional Party Committee and the Regional Council of People’s Commissars⁹.

In a report to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine dated 18 IX 1967, Vitaliy Nikitchenko, the head of the KGB of the Ukrainian SSR, mentioned that just three days after the 5 IX decree’s publication, Crimean Tatars Osmanov, Alimov and Dagdji from Tashkent visited the deputy head of the Crimean Regional Committee, Mykola Moiseev. They inquired about the implementation of the decree concerning benefits for Crimean Tatars related

⁷ L. Alekseeva, *Istoriya inakomyshlyia v SSSR: Noveyshiy period*, Moskva 1992, p. 98.

⁸ O. Bazhan, Y. Danyliuk, S. Kokin, O. Loshytskyi, *Kryms’ki tatars: shliakh do povnennia: kryms’kotatars’kyi natsional’nyi rukh (druha polovyna 1940-kh – pochatok 1990-kh rokiv) ochyma radians’kykh spetsluzhb: Zbirnyk dokumentiv ta materialiv. Chastina 1*, Kyiv 2004, p. 230.

⁹ V. Shirokov, O. Shirokov, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

to resettlement, housing, and employment¹⁰. On 24 IX, a group of 48 Crimean Tatars visited the regional committee to clarify the reasons for their denial of registration and construction of homes¹¹. According to a report by Mykola Kyrychenko, First Secretary of the Crimean Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, dated 3 X 1967, 700 Crimean Tatars had arrived in Crimea¹².

As previously noted, the primary objective of the Crimean Tatars was to meet with the leadership of the Crimean Regional Committee. Records show that such visits were frequent. In a report dated 21 XI 1969, Ivan Holovchenko, Minister of Internal Affairs of the Ukrainian SSR, observed that following the 1967 decree, Crimean Tatars consistently approached local party and Soviet authorities „in large groups” regarding housing and registration¹³. Therefore, it can be reasonably concluded that visiting the Crimean Regional Committee became a key aspect of the Crimean Tatars' return practices in the late 1960s.

Those attempting to return soon realized that the decree of 5 IX was largely symbolic, requiring them to actively fight for their right to live on their homeland. References to the Crimean Tatars using Simferopol's urban spaces for protest emerged as early as September 1967. In a report dated 19 IX, the head of the KGB of the Ukrainian SSR noted that prominent leader Bekir Umerov announced plans for 2,000-3,000 Crimean Tatars from Uzbekistan to resettle in Crimea and pitch tents near the Crimean Party Committee to demand employment and residence permits¹⁴.

Umerov referred to the small park behind the regional party committee building, which first appeared in 1871 as the Seminary Garden, named for its proximity to the theological seminary. Over the years, the park's name changed several times – from Pushkin to Trade Union to Communards – but at the time of these events, it was known as Komsomol Park¹⁵. Since 2013, the square has once again been called Seminary Garden.

¹⁰ Haluzevyi derzhavnyi arkhiv Sluzhby bezpeky Ukrainy (Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine, further: HDA SBU), F. 16, spr. 0963, ark. 169-170.

¹¹ Ibidem, ark. 326.

¹² Y. Bilukha, O. Vlasenko, *Deportovani kryms'ki tatary, bolhary, virmeny, hreky, nimtsi: Dokumenty. Fakty. Svidchennia. (1917-1991)*, Kyiv 2004, p. 272.

¹³ *Tovaryshu Shcherbytskomu. Za Vashym doruchenniam. Kolektsiia dokumentiv z fondu TsK KPU Ukrainy 60-80 rokov shchodo krymskykh tatar*, „Krymski Studii” 2002, no. 5-6 (17-18), [http://www.cidct.org.ua/uk/studii/5-6\(2002\)/10.html](http://www.cidct.org.ua/uk/studii/5-6(2002)/10.html) (20 VII 2024).

¹⁴ HDA SBU, F. 16, spr. 0963, ark. 177-179.

¹⁵ V. Shirokov, O. Shirokov, *op.cit.*, p. 181.

The House of The Soviets, the Regional Executive Committee, and Trenyov Park

The Crimean Tatars' determination to picket the party committee on Karl Marx Street likely prompted the authorities to increase security. By October 1967, another location had appeared on the „protest map” – the Crimean Regional Council of Workers' Deputies (House of Soviets) on 13 Kirova Street. The building also housed the executive committee of the Crimean Regional Council of Workers' Deputies. Construction of the House of Soviets began in 1956 and was completed in 1960. In 1967, a monument to Lenin was unveiled in the square in front of the building¹⁶, where on 1 X, the anniversary of the founding of the Crimean ASSR, Crimean Tatars planned to lay wreaths. However, the „gathering” was preempted by the KGB¹⁷.

Behind the building was Trenyov Park, which had previously been a marketplace square until 1957 and then a public garden named Flower Park (*Park Tsvetov*) until 1960. This park became the epicenter of Crimean Tatar protests in central Simferopol.

On 15 X 1967, according to a report by the head of the KGB of the Ukrainian SSR, Nikitchenko, around 200 Crimean Tatars gathered in Trenyov Park, behind the regional executive committee. After ten of them were invited for a meeting executive committee, the others were asked to disperse as they were „allegedly disturbing public order”. Instead, the crowd moved to the building of the committee, where six individuals were detained, and the rest were dispersed by the police¹⁸.

Trenyov Park holds a significant place in the memories of Crimean Tatars. One of my key informants Alim¹⁹ recalls how he and his companions often gathered in this park and would spend entire days running between the regional executive committee and the police, trying to get a meeting with local authorities. Despite facing resistance from the authorities, they persisted in their efforts. Alim recalls the commanding officer, Zakharov, and his deputy, whom they called „Georgy Georgievich”, who would constantly monitor them:

Georgy Georgievich would come to the park, photograph us, and then hand out the pictures. We would say, ‘Georgy Georgievich, why do you torment yourself? You spend all day with us and then stay up all night developing photos! Don't you need rest too? What joy do you get from sitting with us?’ He replied, ‘You know

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 167.

¹⁷ HDA SBU, F. 16, spr. 0963, ark. 128.

¹⁸ HDA SBU, F. 16, spr. 0963, ark. 42-43.

¹⁹ Name changed for safety reason.

what joy I would get if they allowed me to shoot you? That would bring me true happiness!²⁰.

Alim's group endured this treatment for a year. There were days when the police would detain the Crimean Tatars during the day only to release them at night. For example, on 1 X 1967, 23 Tatars were detained in Trenyov Park and held at a police station until the evening²¹.

Enver Ametov recalls that around 30 Crimean Tatars regularly gathered in Trenyov Park²². Gulnara Bekirova also remembers her parents' dream of returning to their homeland and how, upon arriving in Simferopol, they found many Crimean Tatars in Trenyov Park.

We arrived at Trenyov Square in Simferopol, and there were many, many Crimean Tatars. My parents were tearing down notices and trying to find work, but nothing worked. As soon as they saw my father, they immediately refused. They initially accepted my mother because teachers were needed in Crimea, but once they saw her passport and realized she was Crimean Tatar, they instantly refused as well²³.

The memories of Khairiye Ablaieva are particularly noteworthy. She recalls that in 1968, she and her husband decided to return to Crimea. With two children and nowhere to stay, they slept at the train station and airport, spending their days in Trenyov Park. When it rained, they covered their younger daughter, who was sleeping on the ground, with a raincoat. While her husband searched for a house, Khairiye visited the House of Soviets, becoming a persistent presence for the official Zubenko. By October, after losing hope, she made a final visit to the executive committee, where she was told they were permitted to register in Novozhilovka village²⁴. Khairiye's story illustrates both the hardships Crimean Tatars faced in Crimea during the late 1960s and the faint hope of securing residency through persistent demands to local officials. Despite the misleading nature of the decree and the local elite's reluctance to accept Crimean Tatars, visiting party and Soviet offices occasionally led to success, albeit for a few. For example, by August 1968, 111 Crimean Tatars had been registered in Crimea on a „general basis”, most of them ordinary families like Khairiye Ablaieva's²⁵.

²⁰ Alim (born in 1938), Interviewed by Author, 13 VIII 2017.

²¹ HDA SBU, F. 16, spr. 0969, ark. 81.

²² E. Ametov, *Lyubov' k otchizne vsemi nami dvizhet: Sbornik vospominaniy i razmyshleniy veterana natsional'nogo dvizheniya krymskikh tatar*, Simferopol 2014, p. 7.

²³ G. Bekirova, *Zhit' myslyami o Kryme*, <https://ru.krymr.com/a/krymskiye-tatary-novoalekseyevki-stranici-istorii/29427853.html> (24 VII 2024).

²⁴ Khairie Ablaeva, <http://tamirlar.com/хайрие-аблаева/> (21 VII 2024).

²⁵ HDA SBU, F. 16, spr. 0976, ark. 209.

Despite the rare success stories, the general response from local authorities to Crimean Tatars was quite the opposite. Crimean Tatars who visited regional government offices and party leaders were often detained in waiting rooms or offices by the police²⁶.

Victory Park

Deputy Chairman of the KGB of the Ukrainian SSR, Boris Shulzhenko, reported to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine on 20 VI 1968, about an unauthorized gathering of Crimean Tatars that had taken place the previous day in Victory Park:

On 19 VI 1968, a gathering of 60-70 Crimean Tatars took place in Simferopol's central park, near the Ukraine Hotel. The participants, led by Baiev Homer and Khalilov Rustem, loudly demanded registration and employment in Crimea. Around 200 bystanders gathered around them. The gathering was dispersed²⁷.

Victory Square (the one referred to in the special report, given its proximity to the „Ukraine” hotel) eventually became another location where the Crimean Tatars' struggle for the right to return to their homeland unfolded. The park was established on the site of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, which was completely demolished in 1930. Around the cathedral there was also a park, occasionally referred to as „Sobornyi” Park. Initially named Komsomol Park, and later Pionersky Park, the park's significance grew after Soviet soldiers who died during the liberation of Simferopol were buried there in the spring of 1944, following the de-occupation of the Crimean Peninsula. In June 1944, an OT-34 tank was placed on a pedestal, with an inscription stating that this tank was among the first to break into the city. The remains of the soldiers were later moved to a military cemetery, and in the second half of the 1960s, the park was renamed to Victory Park²⁸. The name remains to this day, although in 1999, the Crimean Parliament approved a decision to rebuild the cathedral. As a result, the tank was relocated to a new pedestal in 2003, several dozen meters southwest, closer to Karl Marx Street. Given that the park's new name appeared only in the late 1960s, documents of that time and Crimean Tatar memoirs contain various attempts to localize it. For example, in the earlier mentioned KGB report, the park is referred to as the „central” park near the „Ukraine” hotel. Alim also points to its proximity to the main post office (then located at 13 Karl Marx Street), which helps

²⁶ E. Ametov, *op.cit.*, p. 27.

²⁷ O. Bazhan, Y. Danyliuk, S. Kokin, O. Loshytskyi, *op.cit.*, p. 227.

²⁸ V. Shirokov, O. Shirokov, *op.cit.*, p. 182-183.

pinpoint the location. Most Crimean Tatars recall this park as the one with a tank on a pedestal.

Crimean Tatars returnees used Victory Park in the same way as Trenyov Park. They were gathering here, discussing plans, waiting for appointments, and even sleeping. Unlike the previous two, Victory Park was not located near government buildings. It was only much later, in the late 1980s, when the new Crimean Regional Committee building was constructed adjacent to the park, that it became a center of political life in Simferopol. However, in the late 1960s, as evidenced by Shulzhenko's special report, a rally in Victory Square, located in the city center, was capable of drawing the attention of residents. Additionally, the square was conveniently located close to both the regional committee and the regional executive committee, with a walk to the House of Soviets (less than 1 km) taking only 10 minutes.

On 26 VI 1968, a group of Crimean Tatars, selected as representatives by a meeting in Victory Park, visited the head of the Crimean Regional Executive Committee, Trofim Chemodurov. When the head of the committee refused to meet them, he called for the police to remove the Crimean Tatars. Eleven Crimean Tatars were arrested and sentenced to 15 days in jail. One individual, Mamed Chobanov, was charged with resisting the police. Ten others were forcibly deported to Tajikistan, where they had never been before²⁹.

After the Crimean Tatars were detained inside the Executive Committee, those who were in Victory Square came to the committee building and demanded the release of the detainees³⁰.

It can be assumed that such rallies were a common practice. For instance, on 15 VIII, around 100 Crimean Tatars, along with their children, staged a picket outside the entrance to the regional executive committee. According to Minister of Internal Affairs Holovchenko, some of them voiced „anti-Soviet” slogans and threats. Ultimately, the rally was dispersed by the police³¹.

But Simferopol's parks were not only a space for political manifestation and urban resistance, but also a place to stay. Crimean Tatars who arrived in Crimea were prohibited from staying in hotels, forcing them to sleep in train stations or at the airport. Occasionally, they could stay with locals for a fee of one ruble. Enver Ametov recalls trying to secure a room at a Simferopol hotel in early 1968. Initially refused due to an order from a „colonel”, he was later allowed to stay without registration³². Crimean Tatars typically slept in stations or rented rooms,

²⁹ Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives (further: HU OSA), *Crimean Tatar Informatsia (no number)*, XI 1968, HU OSA 300-85-9; AS 307.

³⁰ HDA SBU, F. 16, spr. 0973, ark. 273.

³¹ *Tovaryshu Shcherbytskomu...*

³² E. Ametov, *op.cit.*, p.12.

which they had to vacate early, as the property owners feared persecution by local authorities³³.

Human rights activist Petro Grigorenko, who visited Crimea in the summer of 1968, noted that the train station, airport, and city parks were filled with Crimean Tatars, who „besiege” local authorities, demanding residence permits³⁴. Grigorenko described how families with young children were forced to sleep on the cold ground in the parks. He noted that those who slept on the cement floors of the station were fortunate, as others had to endure cold nights outdoors with crying children. Grigorenko also pointed out that even this meager refuge was being taken from the Tatars:

At dawn, they were driven out of the station and airport. But the worst was in the parks. In the early morning, they were sprayed with water. They weren't even woken up – just doused with water from hoses. Imagine how people, especially children, felt, waking up soaked in cold water in the early morning chill³⁵.

Alim also recalls spending time in Victory Park with his fellows. He remembers the Karabash family – Rustem, Mumine, and their seven children – who, without housing, registration, or work, were forced to sleep on the asphalt in the park³⁶. Their eighth child, Vatan (which means „homeland” in Crimean Tatar), was born in 1970, after the family had finally managed to settle in Crimea. Vatan knew the stories of his mother, who told him how the family lived first in the park and then wandered around the peninsula searching for a place to stay³⁷.

Many early returnees, like Emine Khalilova, recall living in Victory Park or, as they called it, „under the tank”. Khalilova mentioned that they lived in the park for three months, „half-starved and half-frozen”, but noted that, despite the hardships, they were at least on their native land³⁸. Another returnee, Seitumer Mustafae, recalls that in 1968, he arrived in Crimea with his wife and two children, the youngest being six months old. During the day, they participated in actions on Lenin Square, and at night, they slept under the tank, covering themselves with jackets. Mustafae added that his wife would wash diapers and bathe the children in the Salgir River³⁹.

³³ HU OSA, *Appeal of the Crimean Tatar people to world conference of Communist and Workers parties and to People of goodwil*, 21 V 1969, HU OSA 300-85-9; AS 137.

³⁴ P. Hryhorenko, *V podpoľe mozhno vstretit' tol'ko krys*, N'iu-York 1981, p. 635.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 637.

³⁶ Alim (born in 1938), Interviewed by Author, 13 VIII 2017.

³⁷ Vatan (born in 1970), Interviewed by author, 18 VIII 2018.

³⁸ D. Ibrahimova, *Pokolenie vernuvshihhsya: 3 semii rasskazali o svoem puti na Rodinu*, <https://www.crimeantatars.club/life/family/pokolenie-vernuvshihhsya-3-semi-rasskazali-o-svojom-puti-na-rodinu> (15 VIII 2024).

³⁹ S. Mustafae, *Milletim, koterlen!*, <https://avdet.org/ru/2013/11/04/milletim-koterlen/> (14 VIII 2024).

The City Park

References to another park, situated on a hill above the Salgir River's left bank, appear only once in available sources. Originally established in the 1820s as the Kazenny (State) Garden, it was located across from the Tavrida Governor's residence. Over time, it became known as the City Garden, a common feature in imperial urban areas. During the Soviet era, it was renamed City Park, and this name was recorded in a 1983 publication⁴⁰. Later, the park appeared on city maps as the Central Park of Culture and Leisure, or simply Central Park. In 2016, the occupying authorities of Simferopol renamed it Ekaterininsky Garden⁴¹.

The mention of the City Park in relation to the return of Crimean Tatars is found in Enver Ametov's memoirs. He describes how Crimean Tatars gathered on the banks of the Salgir River, behind the local cinema⁴². Ametov also recalls that after Crimean Tatars were forcibly expelled from Crimea on 18 V 1968, many of them returned a few days later and gathered again by the Salgir River. On 22 V, they organized an impromptu day of music, singing, and dancing. This attracted the attention of the local authorities, and the police arrived to disperse the group. Ametov and two others were detained and taken to the nearest police station, accused of disturbing the peace. He recalls challenging the accusation by saying, „The place where we were resting is a public park. We are Soviet citizens too. Who were we disturbing?⁴³”.

This incident highlights the fact that the Crimean Tatars were viewed as outsiders and even „dangerous elements” by local authorities not only when they protested demanding housing and employment, but also when they engaged in everyday Soviet activities, such as typical leisure in public parks.

By the end of 1968, efforts to return „according to the law” had largely ceased. Some Crimean Tatars returned to Uzbekistan, while many began forming diaspora communities in neighboring Kherson and Krasnodar regions. These areas became transitional spaces, situated between exile and homeland. Others moved to small villages in the northern steppe region of Crimea, where they stood a better chance of obtaining permits from local authorities or, at the very least, remaining unnoticed.

⁴⁰ V. Shirokov, O. Shirokov, *Simferopol: Ulitsy rasskazyvayut*, p. 176.

⁴¹ Reshenie No. 848 Simferopol'skogo gorodskogo soveta o pereimenovanii Tsentral'nogo parka kul'tury i otdykha v Park kul'tury i otdykha „Ekaterininskii sad”, http://simgov.ru/static/writable/documents/2016/08/03/_848_Екатерининский_сад.pdf (13 VIII 2024).

⁴² E. Ametov, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

Conclusion

After the 5 IX 1967, decree, many Crimean Tatars attempted to return to Crimea „through the front door” by appealing to the Crimean regional and party leadership. They demanded registration, employment, and housing, relying on the decree, Lenin’s national policy, and Soviet law. This return was characterized by peaceful resistance and the perseverance of the Crimean Tatars, who continued to gather in central parks and squares in Simferopol, despite persecution by local authorities. Though the first wave of return was modest in size, it represented a significant assertion of their claim to their homeland.

It is difficult to imagine that, nearly a year before Soviet tanks entered Prague and the first documented public protest in the Soviet Union occurred in Red Square, a small group of Crimean Tatars in Simferopol in 1967 dared to challenge the established Soviet order. They encroached upon a sacrosanct urban space—one controlled by the authorities, shaped to their specifications, and designed to reinforce Soviet ideology. By squatting public space Crimean Tatars challenged the dominant narratives and power structures in Simferopol. Simferopol’s public spaces, such as squares and parks, were highly contested during this period. Crimean Tatars reclaimed these spaces as sites of resistance. They framed their struggle, using narratives of injustice, historical rights, and cultural identity.

Crimean Tatars used public spaces for peaceful gatherings, demonstrations, and protests, expressing their demands for return and equal rights. Moreover, for them public spaces in Simferopol represented more than just physical locations; they symbolized their homeland and embodied the struggle for recognition and justice. By occupying these spaces, Crimean Tatars asserted their presence in a city that had been denied to them for decades, using urban landscapes as platforms for visibility, resistance, and identity formation. Their efforts to reclaim public spaces symbolize a broader struggle for identity, rights, and recognition within the urban landscape. By occupying these spaces, they challenge historical injustices and assert their presence and claims to their homeland.

Public spaces served as „theaters” where the Crimean Tatar struggle became visible to the broader public. The act of gathering in these spaces allowed the movement to engage with a wider audience, both local and national. By doing it, they shared narrative of injustice with so-called local population. The visibility of these protests in highly symbolic locations drew attention to their plight and resistance to Soviet-imposed exclusion, making their struggle for rights and recognition a public matter.

Soviet authorities sought to control and limit Crimean Tatars’ access to public spaces by preventing gatherings, persecuting those who attempted to protest and even deporting returnees out from Crimea. Public squares and parks were spaces

tightly regulated, as they were key in promoting Soviet ideology. The Crimean Tatars countered these efforts through peaceful protests, sit-ins, and gatherings in central locations, challenging the narrative of Soviet control over urban space.

The Crimean Tatars' return movement on this very first stage (1967-1968) can be understood as a form of „claiming the city”, where public spaces in Simferopol, such as parks and squares, became vital arenas of resistance. These spaces, historically controlled by Soviet authorities, were reappropriated by Crimean Tatars, symbolizing their assertion of rights to their homeland. The act of occupying these spaces not only contested Soviet authority but also embodied the struggle for national autonomy.

The Crimean Tatar return movement parallels broader decolonization and national liberation efforts occurring globally in the 20th century. Like other colonized or marginalized groups, the Crimean Tatars sought to reclaim their cultural and territorial rights, often aligning their struggle with anti-colonial sentiments prevalent in other movements across the world. Their resistance was not just a local issue but part of a larger push for self-determination and decolonization within the Soviet context.

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Abstrakt

Martin-Oleksandr Kisly

W cieniu parków Symferopola: Powrót Tatarów Krymskich do ojczyzny pod koniec lat 60. XX w.

Celem niniejszego opracowania jest zwrócenie uwagi na powrót Tatarów Krymskich do ojczyzny pod koniec lat 60. XX w. i ich walkę o prawo do zamieszkania na Krymie. W artykule przeanalizowano wizyty Tatarów Krymskich u władz radzieckich i partyjnych w Symferopolu, centrum administracyjnym regionu krymskiego, demonstracje protestacyjne oraz squatowanie na placach publicznych i w parkach. Głównym celem badania jest rzucenie światła na niedostatecznie zbadany rozdział w historii powrotu Tatarów Krymskich, który miał miejsce po podpisaniu dekretu z 5 IX 1967 r., wydanego przez Prezydium Rady Najwyższej ZSRR. W niniejszym artykule starano się zrekonstruować ich walkę

o prawo do powrotu na Krym w obliczu oporu władz radzieckich, wykorzystując perspektywę historii miejskiej skupioną na Symferopolu, a zwłaszcza na jego centralnej części.

Słowa kluczowe: Krym, Tatarzy Krymscy, Symferopol, przestrzeń miejska, powrót, protest

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