Squatting, Self-Immolation and the Repatriation of the Crimean Tatars

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In the summer of 1978, a Crimean Tatar man named Musa Mamut walked out of his home in a small village in the Crimea toward a policeman waiting for him at his front gate. He was to be taken to the station for questioning, and quite possibly arrested for “violation of the passport regime.” But Mamut had already drenched himself with gasoline and, lighting a match, was engulfed in flames. He ran toward the policeman, who ran the other way. A deliveryman tripped Musa, and two friends who had been passing by extinguished the flames. His friends took him to the Simferopol city hospital, where he died six days later, never expressing any regret for what he did.

In this article, I try to understand why Musa Mamut immolated himself on that June morning. This is the first step toward deciphering what Mamut’s death came to mean for his people. After his immolation, Mamut became a martyr and a model—another instance of the affinity of national imagining with death and immortality so famously observed by Benedict Anderson. Combined, the interpretations of Mamut’s death condense much more diffuse and amorphous cultural meanings, leading me to suggest that interpretations of Mamut’s death are a site for the social construction of vatan or homeland. As such, his life helps constitute the very meaning of homeland for Crimean Tatars. I make this argument based on insights into how the idea of homeland is constructed not on a political level but on a microsocial one that becomes especially apparent in an interview with Mamut’s closest survivors.

Anderson, Miroslav Hroch, Ernest Gellner, and many other scholars have called attention to the role of intellectual elites in formulating nationalism as a cultural construct. For them, the idea of the nation is built on an abstract and decontextualized foundation, which provides its modular character. But Anderson’s argument requires us to make a conceptual leap from the elite construct to a belief that is collectively held in spite of class, race, and gender differences. In fact, he argued that, regardless of actual conditions of inequality and exploitation, the nation is conceived as a horizontal comradeship and it is precisely this comradeship that makes people willingly die for nationalist imaginings. Subsequent studies have attempted to locate the connections between these various levels of belonging such as family, home, community, and nation to understand how the elite construct is instantiated on the so-called everyday level.
But how to trace the interconnections that make national allegiance possible is still a complicated question. Many studies turn to a trickle-down approach. Tom Nairn, for example, argues that while “the masses” are important, it is intellectual elites who spread nationalism. Naturally, this formulation raises the question of how intellectual interests might become profound emotional attachments and why some degree of loyalty to a region on the part of “common people” might turn into identification with a nation. But the categories “elite” and “common” are inherently troublesome. By shifting our focus away from different groups of people to different kinds of social practice, we can avoid the difficulties that this hierarchical model of nationalism suggests.

A more useful assumption from which to proceed is that the difference between elites and common people is not that one group formulates ideology and the other does not, or that nationalist discourse is necessarily hegemonic, but rather that ideologies of common people are often taken differently than those of elites. In the approach to patriotism which I am suggesting, the point is not so much to identify and celebrate a multiplicity of voices, as to recast the whole issue of the location of nationalist discourse such that common and elite are not the fundamental units. Thus recast, the social conditions can be investigated for the emergence of cultural ideologies in general, including nationalist ones. Conversational discourse is an important means by which cultural ideologies and emotional comportments are produced and maintained.

To explore Musa Mamut’s self-immolation, I draw on three main sources: my own 1998 interview with his wife, son, witness, and native chronicler; Human Torch, a selection of documents including verbatim testimony collected immediately after the immolation by Crimean Tatar dissidents Ayshe Seytmuratova and Reshat Dzhemilev; and a personal interview with the leader of the national movement. I also draw on impressions gleaned from my 1995–1998 fieldwork, when informants often recalled Mamut to convey the essence of their plight. I interacted with hundreds of Crimean Tatars in Ukraine and Tajikistan Uzbekistan in the process of data collection and cannot count the number of people who, when they wanted to encapsulate their problem, described Mamut as a way of conveying both the extremes to which they felt they were being driven and the lengths to which they were willing to go. Rare was the individual who felt his action was excessive. In fact, while I lived in Ukraine, other immolations took place as well. Given that thoughts and acts of immolation are not anomalous but widespread, immolation deserves further exploration. By devoting detailed attention to the formal particularities, content, and social-spatial organization of the conversation with Musa Mamut’s survivors, we can begin to identify and understand emergent cultural meanings.

The shortcomings of this material are immediately apparent: I have not interviewed Mamut, the central protagonist. In this respect, however, I am not alone, for no study can include the testimony of a person who has contemplated and successfully completed the act of suicide. In the study of suicide, there is no representative
sample. Therefore, epistemological issues accompany any attempt to understand suicide. But, since the aim of the article is to understand the general meaning for Crimean Tatars in the present, interviewing the main protagonist is not essential. Rather, an examination of the 1998 interview in relation to the verbatim testimony in 1978 offers a unique opportunity to study memory in operation and witness the fundamentally social nature of the production of memories.

The interview with Mamut’s wife, son, friend and chronicler was a challenging one because the four of them interrupted and corrected each other repeatedly. I departed from the interview suspecting that I would not have material for analysis as a result of it—the story was far too fragmented. But in transcribing and translating the interview from Russian and Crimean Tatar to English several months later, I realized that what I had originally thought of as “breakdowns” in “the story” of an individual were really windows on intersubjectivity. What sparked my interest the most was that the speakers seemed to forget, confuse, and trade lines, and yet create a shared meaning in the process anyway. The interruptions and corrections actually reveal the seams in the process of weaving an interpretation, as do the speakers’ fabricated interjections of themselves into the story of Mamut.

Because the narratives they provided are simultaneously individual and collective, Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism is important to understanding the interview. Bakhtin used the concept of dialogism to refer to the internal dynamics in the discourse of a single speaker. The basic insight is that when actors speak, their words are not merely their own but reflect their engagement in the ideological and verbal worlds of which they are a part. Giving attention to dialogism exposes the constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. In this interview, for example, Mamut’s friend Redvan embeds the voices of various authorities in his speech. This is significant because the voices, which can be viewed as a system, not only relate events, but establish a moral evaluation of events at the same time, making this a site for ideological production that otherwise would not be possible.

Dialogue in the sense of an interaction among speakers also warrants examination here. An idea that dovetails with Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism and is equally helpful is Erving Goffman’s idea of “footing,” which highlights the relation between speakers and utterances. Goffman’s insight was that a speaker producing quoted speech is a speaker in a very different sense than one who produces direct discourse. The traditional view of conversation as something that takes place in a dyad needs to become more finely shaded to allow for the roles of a single speaker as well as multiparty talk. He suggested that the role of a speaker can be analytically subdivided into different roles. The significance of this for the conversation being analyzed is that the animator of the words isn’t necessarily the author of the statements in the conversation. And, while the “true” author of the most key phrases is believed to be Mamut, there is often confusion over who said what. Speakers seem to struggle to establish themselves as “principal,” or what Goffman described as the
person whose position is established by the words that are spoken. Yet no matter how they struggle, the most desired position of principal remains the most unstable.

While all speech is dialogic and draws its value from the ideological horizons of a society, what deserves attention are the particular kinds of borrowing, paraphrasing, and rephrasing. They can provide clues to the production of meaning—in this case, the meaning of being Tatar and the meaning of vatan or homeland. Interviewees insert themselves into the story of Mamut, demonstrating concretely how national selves emerge from the specific ways in which voices are deployed either in harmonization with the (recalled) speech of a martyr or in oppositional voices to the authorities. Various forms of quotation, as William Hanks has observed, are just one instance of a much more widespread linguistic phenomenon whereby speakers indicate that a portion of their utterance is anchored elsewhere. An often neglected aspect of this “elsewhere” is its temporal dimension. In the conversation below, the quoting and paraphrasing of Mamut suggests speech in the present is a palimpsest for utterances in the past and contains implicit directives for the future. The importance of this will not escape scholars of social movements who have been interested in the uses of the past in the present. The various configurations of co-presence and absence of speakers, the lamination of the present and the past, as well as the individual and his or her context encourage us to consider the discursive grounds of community in conversation.

**Musa Mamut’s background**

Musa Mamut was born in the Crimea in 1931 and was 13 years old when Stalin deported the Crimean Tatars to the Ural Mountains and Central Asia for allegedly collaborating with the Nazis. Musa’s family was taken to the Tashkent oblast of Uzbekistan, where he watched two of his four brothers and both his sisters die of starvation. His parents also died shortly after deportation. Beginning at the age of 13, Mamut worked in the cotton industry. Although he only had a fourth-grade education, he was able to enroll in technical school and graduated a year later as a tractor-machinist qualified to work on all agricultural machinery. His life under the “special settlement” regime was by no means pleasant: he was subject to beatings at work and on one occasion was beaten to unconsciousness for arriving late to check in with the commander of the special settlement regime where he was registered.

In 1967, a decree admitted the charges of treason were wrongfully leveled against the whole population. This prompted some families to try to return to the Crimea. While they were technically allowed to reside anywhere in the Soviet Union, Moscow party officials had stipulated that Crimean authorities should not allow Tatars to obtain a propiska (residence permit), become employed or purchase property in the Crimea. So when Mamut, now married, returned in 1975, it was only to be denied the required propiska at the address of the house he bought. Not only
was his purchase of a house invalidated, but without registration he was refused work. In 1976, criminal charges were brought against Mamut and his wife, and they were convicted of violating the passport regime according to statute 196 of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Mamut, served over two years, while his wife was convicted “provisionally,” enabling her to stay home with their children. When Mamut returned from prison in 1978, the authorities continued to harass him and threatened that he must leave the Crimea or face additional charges. Mamut refused, stating that he would prefer dying to giving up his homeland.

The reason for his return is sufficiently naturalized among Crimean Tatars as to seem self-evident. Most deported Tatars did not forget their birthplace, but dreamed of returning. This was reinforced by Soviet nationalities policy, based as it was on ethno-territorial units. Tatar national identity, it is important to note, is an identity that primarily evolved in exile.\textsuperscript{19} It was under the centrifugal force of the special settlement regime that Crimean Tatars became increasingly aware of themselves as a people, and this awareness gathered centripetal force around the idea of having a place where they belonged and where by right they could be free of the punitive actions, derogatory remarks, and interminable disrespect they suffered everywhere else. Even though conditions had improved by the time of the 1967 decree, most Tatars were firmly convinced that return was essential to cultural survival.

After returning to Crimea, Mamut could see that he was not the only one being harassed by the authorities. He wrote many letters appealing to the higher organs of authority about the local administration’s refusal to register him. But no matter where he wrote, all his letters were returned to those he was complaining about. Mamut was concerned not only about the fate of his family, but also about the fate of other Crimean Tatars. When he met with friends, they often discussed what could be done to facilitate repatriation. It was in this mental crucible that the idea of immolation came to him. Like many of his compatriots, he believed that drawing attention to their plight would facilitate its rapid solution.

Mamut chose a public and dramatic expression of protest and his death became an inseparable part of Crimean Tatars collected memories. An important interpretation of his death is provided by a poem by Aleksandrov called \textit{Fakel nad Krymom} (Torch Over Crimea), which circulated in the \textit{samizdat} press.\textsuperscript{20} The poem conveys the idea that \textit{vatan} or homeland was valued more highly by Mamut than anything else—it was dearer than family and life itself. Mamut is portrayed as morally victorious over a corrupt system and therefore immortal. There are many other mentions of his act in the literature by and about Crimean Tatars as well. For example, a \textit{samizdat} letter about the death of another activist, Bekir Osmanov, mentions how Osmanov was buried next to Mamut.\textsuperscript{21} Andrei Sakharov wrote a letter to Brezhnev about the event.\textsuperscript{22} Important volumes that treat the history of the Crimean Tatars, such as those by Edward Allworth and Vladimir Poliakov, also mention Mamut.\textsuperscript{23} But perhaps as importantly, the depth and breadth of his influence are revealed in the consciousness
of Tatars today. As mentioned, Mamut was an emblem of their plight and was often recalled as a shorthand way of explaining the depth and complexity of their problem.

After Mamut died, “Homeland or Death” became a popular slogan that helped galvanize Tatars in their struggle to return. On the way to the hospital, some of Mamut’s last words were “What I have done will not pass without effect.” These words turned out to be prophetic: there are many effects or traces of his act in subsequent events associated with repatriation. In the remainder of the article, I will focus on five of these traces or “iterations” of his death in order to show how his death became constitutive of the meaning of homeland for Crimean Tatars. Each iteration presents an instance in which Mamut’s words or deeds have been reiterated in the present. I will also touch upon some the people who went before Mamut and may have influenced his action.

First Iteration: “I’m Going to Die”

Redvan, Mamut’s friend and a witness to his death, began to tell me about Mamut in the family’s home in the village of Besh-Terek, currently Donskoie, Crimea. But before he could tell me of Mamut’s immolation, he told me his own story of potential immolation that took place in 1989, 11 years later. While defending a squatter’s settlement, Redvan prepared to blow himself up in order to end a police offensive. He stated, “I’m going to die,” but at the last minute, the tank failed to explode. The embedding of one story in another demonstrates in Bakhtinian fashion the extent to which speech is filled with allusions, paraphrases, and quotations of previous discourse. The incredible facility with which Redvan and other interviewees insert their story into Mamut’s is directly related to the National Movement because at the same time that the juxtaposition is made to seem natural, this kind of alignment in itself constitutes an act of cultural framing.

Even though Redvan’s veteran status enabled him to register and receive a pension, he became personally invested in helping the rest of his people repatriate. This led him to try to prevent the police from leveling a nearby squatters’ settlement.

RC: I told my guys, “Move away, I will stay here, I’m going to die here,” see. I’m staying. … My brother stayed and another young guy stayed. I said, “Umir blow the oxygen tank,” the oxygen tank, it’s equal to a five hundred kilogram bomb! We’re also going to die.

… But that young man couldn’t blow it up. You had to open it just a teeny bit, but he opened it all the way and vooosh. Oil poured, oil went flying, the tank didn’t blow up. The police started to run back, they got scared and then when the tank didn’t blow up and all the air went out, they with their automatics, their shields, come at us.

He then described how they caught him and the police grabbed his head and rubbed his face in the dirt, remarking that if he wanted Crimean soil, he could “eat up.” Redvan went on to explain his arrest:
They beat me such that when they hit, my head would go to one side, you know. They took us and put us in a car and brought us to the Alushtha police. The guys who had run away were also caught. Then we were all sitting there and there was a row of policemen here and a row of policemen there. My face is all dirty and covered with blood. I looked at them and said, “You think you beat us,” I said, “No. You showed your backwardness insulting national integrity.” I said, “We’ll show you, we won’t back down.”

The graphic replay of violence in Redvan’s story is striking considering 20 years have passed. It seems to serve him as a device for conveying the moral of his story. Redvan takes up the words of the policemen who are insulting Crimean Tatars, giving listeners such as myself an idea of how the Crimean Tatars were abused by law enforcement officials. At the same time, he provides himself with a new, discursive opportunity to offer a rebuttal, as he does with his statement that despite the blood on his face the police have not “won,” only revealed how base they are. The way in which Redvan embeds voices in recounting the dialogue at the police station drives home his moral victory.

What is remarkable about Redvan’s narrative is its incredible dynamism: he embeds over 22 voices in his narrative, animating it and giving it a very different temper than his 1978 testimony. The figures he voices include the policemen at the 1989 demonstration, “authorities,” Russian and Ukrainian neighbors, a “smart Pole,” several different KGB officers, a prison warden, Tatar neighbors, doctors at the hospital, Mamut’s wife, a local beaurocrat, a Tatar elder, a kolkhoz president, and a party official. There is a tremendous range of voices because he also includes a telegram calling him in to a meeting, and uses traditional sayings, such as when he compares himself to a “lamb of sacrifice.” In Redvan’s narrative, we have a close-up view of the way meaning is built in discourse as it unfolds. The idea that speech is a form of engagement that produces experience as much as reports about it is apropos here. Redvan manipulates the “world” he created, and the world enters his dialogue. So his narrative is not a reflection of an extralinguistic reality but a production of a particular reality. The experience thus produced is irredicibly social.

I was perplexed about Redvan’s willingness to give up his life because as a legally registered resident, he could have chosen to just stay home. I asked him why he chose his course of action.

RD: We had decided, we kissed the Koran, we were to die there. We were ready, we were to die there. We weren’t afraid of anything.
GU: But isn’t that suicide? Suicide is forbidden by the Koran.
RD: No, we vowed. We are going to fight to the death here and therefore we kissed the Koran in case we should die here. It’s not a sin, we [did it] for the people. We aren’t going to give in.

As it turns out, Crimean Tatars resolve the contradiction between the well-known prohibition against suicide in the Koran and Mamut’s act by defining his act as falling within, not outside Shari’a, or “the law.” Informants elaborated the thinking
that, above all, it is an individual’s duty to serve Allah and if there is no other path of remaining faithful, then it is not a sin to end one’s life. This made Redvan’s proposed replication of Mamut’s action and his proclamation that “We are going to die here” acceptable to the Tatar compatriots who stood by. Framed in these terms, the suggestion that he, his brother, and his friend would sacrifice themselves for the *ulema* or “community” was taken as a noble sacrifice, fully within the spirit if not the letter of the law.²⁹

The community as a whole is particularly crucial here. Redvan mentions that the motivation behind his behavior was to do something “for my people,” a statement that will be picked up later by Reshat and reassigned to Mamut. It is through this kind of dialogism, that statements become increasingly prominent themes. As Bakhtin explained, a dialogical approach is possible wherever voices “collide.” Dialogical relationships are possible among any part of an utterance “if that word is perceived not as the impersonal word of language but as a sign of someone else’s semantic position.”³⁰ In this conversation, “for my people” is a good example of one such collision when various speakers lay claim to Mamut’s style of heroism and their words overlap.

**Second Iteration: “For the People”**

Reshat Dzhemilev, the Crimean Tatar dissident who recorded the oral testimony in 1978, appreciated Redvan’s performance of the story but made an interjection:

RD: You forgot that I gave my life for my people, so that they would live in the homeland, I gave my life.
RC: That’s understood as it is!
RD: As is, no! He said it to you in words, you told it to me then.
RC: Well, … yes.³¹

This moment in the conversation vividly demonstrates that reality is forged not only through language within an utterance such as Redvan’s, but also in the sociospatial relations between speakers. Reshat interjects what he thinks Redvan (and later in the conversation Mamut’s son) forgot to say. His advanced age and role as one of the chroniclers after the event gave him the authority to do so. The trouble is that according to the testimony he himself took down and published,³² neither Redvan nor Mamut voiced “for my people” back in 1978. And yet the participants in the conversation agree with the correction. A great deal is at stake here because the shift demonstrates the way in which memory is a process of negotiation and meaning a collective affair. Their reconstruction of the event illustrates how memory is above all a creative process.³³ No individual’s ability to remember is independent of social milieu.
Notice that Reshat does not say “you forgot that Musa said,” but in more streamlined fashion offers the statement “you forgot that I gave my life for my people.” This is an excellent example of “double voicing” because there is no direct attribution here: we can hear Mamut’s voice reverberating within Reshat’s. Reshat thereby identifies himself with the hero even though the author of the words remains unclear. This alignment constitutes a linguistic shift or, in Goffman’s terms, a shift in footing, indicative of a projected self.  

Through speech, these individuals are reaching beyond themselves to create meanings and identities that were not there before—in this case a community of sentiment in which Reshat and Redvan ally themselves with Mamut’s devotion to homeland, or, perhaps more accurately what they imagine Mamut’s devotion to homeland to have been. In this way, language becomes a medium richer than description or reference. Regardless of the true author of the statement, they agree that doing something “for the people” was the crux of Mamut’s motivation, and thereby establish a normative ideal of behavior for repatriating Tatars.

The phrase “for the people,” travels an interesting route in this conversation. It first appears voiced by Redvan in reference to himself. It is next voiced by Reshat in reference to Redvan’s forgotten citation of Mamut. It comes up in the speech of Reshat two more times before its final appearance voiced by Redvan as the reason he prepared to immolate himself in 1989, even though he was already legally residing in Crimea. The phrase “devoted to the people” is also used by Unus, Mamut’s son, to describe his father. It is through these successive iterations and instantiations that the phrase “for the people” becomes venerated by the people. This “trace” of Mamut’s ideals in the lives of others illustrates the point I would like to make that Mamut’s life helps define the meaning of homeland for Crimean Tatars. He is repeatedly invoked as a standard, although as with any iterative effects of language, there is inevitably slippage between the original utterance, its repetition, and interpretation.

The discourse surrounding Mamut seems to be telling us that if nations are imagined communities, and if homeland is socially constructed, then it is not only by the trickle-down of an elite construct. There may be an elite construct fashioned by intellectuals, but if we take our analysis to another level of magnification, we see that the “common” people have been representationally simplified. At a microsocial level, there is a dialogic creation of reality in the polyphony of an individual’s utterance and the sociospatial relations between speakers. Relations among speakers create the social conditions for the emergence of particular cultural ideologies, and the spontaneous conversational discourse surrounding Mamut’s death provides a context in which meanings are both produced and challenged. Speakers fold familiar heroic refrains into their impromptu verbal reenactments. Arjun Appadurai reminds us that sentiment, in this instance about homeland, is not a matter of transparent communication but of public negotiation of responses.
Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s *The Invention of Tradition* created an opening for cultural studies to examine how the nation is produced through processes of imaginative labor. Lauren Berlant forged ahead by considering what she called the harnessing of affect to political life through the production of “national fantasy.” She was particularly interested in the ways in which national culture becomes local through images, narratives, and sites in both individual and collective consciousness. But a close analysis of the dialogue and dialogic effects in the interview with Mamut’s family and friends leads me to believe that how the local, all the way down to the level of several interlocutors, is formulated as national is equally important. To grasp the importance of these dynamics entails turning Berlant’s formulation upside down and looking at the micropractices of mobilization. What is in evidence here is an instance in which neither elite nor common, and neither individual nor collective can claim to take precedence. I am not arguing that the microsocial takes precedence over the macrosocial, but that the issue has been unfortunately cast in terms that hamper clarification of the dynamics we seek to elucidate. For these very reasons, the dialogic ground of sentiments of patriotism has been eclipsed. It is wise to consider not only the political ideology that is open for debate, but the implicit frameworks of meaning that make these debates possible. The problematic articulation of microsocial dynamics with macrosocial phenomenon is partially clarified by Douglas McAdam, who writes that “movements may occur in a broad macro context, but their actual development clearly depends on a series of more specific dynamics operating at the micro level.” A micro-mobilization setting is formed by any small group in which the process of collective attribution is combined with rudimentary forms of organization and mobilization.

**Third Iteration: “Beautiful Death”**

In spite of their consensus and their apparent alignment with the hero, the disunity inherent in the Crimean Tatar nation-building project is also revealed in the conversation. Redvan supports the credo “All for one, one for all,” but there are contradictions. He and Reshat suggest that the official leader of the National Movement, Mustafa Dzhemilev, is neither a leader nor a hero. The movement may have a singular goal, but there are multiple and very robust factions within it.

While the Crimean Tatars have demonstrated bravery and self-sacrifice, this too is not without cracks and fissures that lead to a hazier picture. From Reshat’s description of Mustafa Dzhemilev in this conversation, we learn that apparently self-sacrificial acts can also be unauthentic performances of egoistic individuals. Reshat alleges that based on his admiration of Mamut, Mustafa crafted what he called a “beautiful death” for himself. Reshat related their conversation as follows:

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“Musa Mamut outdid me, he incinerated himself and a repeat won’t work,” he said. “Therefore, when they arrest me I am going to announce a hunger strike. I am going to keep a hunger fast until the end. Until they either free me, or I die there.”

[To which I replied,] “Don’t do it, we know that our death is the happiness of our enemies, you shouldn’t do that. We must fight. We must dedicate ourselves to the fight, not to our enemy’s happiness. If we die today, our enemies will be happy.”

“No,” he says, “no matter how you try to dissuade me, you won’t.”42

Mustafa Dzhemilev’s activism had a tremendous impact on international awareness of the Crimean Tatar issue. His contribution to the repatriation of Crimean Tatars is truly remarkable. But there is an increasing amount of ambivalence on the part of Tatars. Questions about his motivation have also been raised. Reshat alleges that the two lawyers who were allowed to see Mustafa Dzhemilev on this occasion reported he was not in fact carrying out a hunger strike at this time. As time has passed, Dzhemilev’s efforts are interpreted less as a desire to make a difference in the lives of the people, and more oriented toward enhancing his political position.

In my 1998 interview, the speakers juxtapose three deaths: Musa Mamut’s “authentic” death; Redvan’s foiled death; and Mustafa’s “unauthentic” death. It is through these contrasting “deaths” that the ideals of participation in the National Movement are communicated. Mamut is being fashioned as a national hero who, by sacrificing his life, facilitated return migration. Equally significant is the articulation between an individual’s life or “identity,” and the movement for repatriation that is established in conversation.

**Fourth Iteration: “We Will Blow Up Together”**

One measure of the extent to which Mamut may have become “immortal” is in the repertoires of contention developed by repatriating Crimean Tatars during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Not only did repatriating Tatars refuse to back down when authorities tried to evict them, but like Redvan they were ready to die, either by immolating themselves, being shot or standing in front of moving trains.

In subsequent manifestations, self-immolation appears as a tactic when Tatars are in a standoff with authorities. While Tatars have only made this threat with the willingness to follow through, it is so successful that gasoline does not necessarily have to be present. The police and Special Forces know Tatars are serious, and have been known to take canisters of water for gasoline. The following statement by a female informant demonstrates the power of the iterative effects I have been discussing:

It so happened that at the time we were doing the plastering in those two rooms and they came and started to chase us out. The police were there with sticks. It was cold, there was snow, and at the time, I didn’t have running water so there were twenty-liter containers sitting there with water in them. Two containers.
I said, “If you are going to evict me,” I said, “there’s gasoline and I’m going to start you on fire and myself on fire. I don’t have anything left to lose.” I said, ‘I don’t have anywhere to go, I don’t have a home in Uzbekistan anymore, I don’t have a house here,” I said, “I’m just going to live here. You will die with me—we will blow up together!” He shot [a picture of] me, and then they ran!  

This woman’s experience was by no means unique. Many of the 250,000 returnees who were unable to find housing through conventional channels were forced to occupy or squat on vacant land, bringing them into physical confrontation with law enforcement and bureaucratic standoffs with administrators.  

In a personal interview, Mustafa Dzhemilev explained the scenario more concretely:

The situation here was such that when Crimean Tatars began returning the authorities of course were not thrilled. They did not want return. But it was already 1987 and perestroika was already in full swing. … Then we began to turn to the authorities with the request to be provided with parcels of land so that we could build for ourselves. Under various pretexts we were refused, saying that its kolkhoz land and something was supposed to be built there. A factory here, an industry there. In all cases we were refused. At the same time, the Russians increasingly began to give out plots for gardens and dachas. It was the old official politics: agitators even went around to Russian families in the villages. They said, “Hurry up and take land, invite your relatives and friends from Russia. We’ll help you receive land, you will build, otherwise Crimea will become Tatar.” And so in the course of 1989–1990, 150 plots of land were given to Russians. The strategy was to give to Russians as quickly as possible but say to us, “Well there is none left, what can we do?” And then the Crimean Tatars began to occupy vacant plots of land for themselves and then they sent the OMON and the police out against us. Then the clashes began. … At first they resisted, sending the OMON, bringing charges, starting a case, and trying to evict us from there. But then we capture all over again. Then they saw that it was useless and started to legalize.

Self-immolation was an important part of the squatting strategy that made repatriation possible. However, the practice remains to be codified and historicized by Tatars, who often downplay its significance, even though land reclamation has been backed by both real and threatened immolation.

Mamut’s funeral marks an especially significant place in Crimean Tatar memory. Subsequently, a monument was erected by the grave of Mamut in the cemetery, which is visited by Tatars. Driving past the turnoff to his village, Crimean Tatars inevitably point out where he lived. On my first trip to the Crimea in 1995, it was a recommended “field trip” and as mentioned earlier, the topic of his immolation came up repeatedly as an encapsulation of their plight. Mamut is the emblem of their suffering, invoked as both example and ideal. One of the forms that this takes is that many informants reminisce about when they went to his funeral, partially because it was so difficult to get there and partially because it was a memorable and spiritually galvanizing moment in the history of the movement.
Fearing a massive demonstration, the authorities closed all the roads. Undaunted, many Tatars flocked to the funeral on foot over rugged terrain. The authorities were justifiably concerned because his funeral did turn into a demonstration with banners such as “Shame on Soviet power!” The police did what they could to contain the ritual, but their very presence seems to have exacerbated the tension. Most of the Tatars living in the Crimea at the time tried to attend because word of his death spread so rapidly.

One reason the funeral proved to be a formative event was that an elder ended his speech with a call that they make a vow, an oath. He suggested they vow not to forget Musa Mamut or ever give up the struggle to return home. As one informant recalled, “He said, ‘At the end, comrades and compatriots we will swear by the grave of Musa Mamut.’ And we all cried out, ‘We swear, we swear, we swear!’”

This vowing or swearing carries some of the flavor of J. L. Austin’s notion of illocutionary force. The saying of certain words meant the doing of certain acts: the elder’s statement not only underlined the importance of remembering Mamut but when the people responded to his call, “We swear, we swear, we swear,” it entailed making a spiritual and moral commitment. Clearly, the capacity of speech to define a situation and indicate a course of action can be very powerful.

In a 1996 interview with an informant, the issues that Mamut’s death raised are taken up and related to contemporary developments such as the slogan “Homeland or Death” and the history of the land claims. This informant points out the double meaning of immolation, which is simultaneously directed inward toward oneself and outward toward the authorities in a certain militancy:

IK: [I]f there had not been the decisiveness and there was not that slogan and the readiness to die or be on that soil, they would have sent us out of there and there would not be 250,000 Tatars there today. In other words, they would have thrown us out of there!

GU: Again?

IK: Yes, and there would not be 250,000 Crimean Tatars there today. There are moments when peaceful means are exhausted and the moment arrives when you need to be able to both defend and maybe also take the offensive, and I consider that the slogan “Homeland or Death” was at a certain time justified.

It was in opposition to the Soviet authorities that the slogan “Homeland or Death” was born. Mamut’s last words, layered with Crimean Tatars’ subsequent interpretations of the event in successive iterations, generate the significance that has gradually accrued to his death.

Fifth Iteration: Survival Issues Upstage Politics

On a November morning in 1997, while I was conducting fieldwork in Simferopol, Ukraine, a 34-year-old man named Lenur Ametov immolated himself on the steps of the Supreme Soviet of the Crimea. This was followed by rumors of two other immolations taking place in rural areas. A Kiev-based newspaper, Krymskoe Vremya,
reported, "In the estimation of law enforcement officials, the act has no political subtext." 50 The paper also reported a suicide note in which Ametov asked that no one be blamed for his death. 51 Given that he chose the steps of the Supreme Soviet, the act can not exactly be seen as devoid of political meaning, but the newspaper commentary did appear to have a palliative effect. As Tilly has pointed out, people take with them from the past not only a history of their claims and a sense of identity, but also the particular forms of claim making they have at their disposal. 52 When the past frames ideas about what actions are possible, permissible, and desirable like this, we see another trace of Mamut’s act in the present. But Ametov’s immolation was interpreted in a different way and carries another meaning, pointing to changes in the Crimean setting as well as continuity.

Whereas Tatars took to the streets for Mamut’s funeral, after Ametov’s death the only place to go was home. When I asked, informants stressed that Ametov was not alone: everyone is in such a state right now that it seems a completely normal thing to do. Some even suggested that many people are on the absolute brink of such despair. 53 These replies point to a radically different historical moment than the one in which Musa Mamut immolated himself, suggesting the conversational analysis offered here must be grounded in current material conditions.

Surprisingly, the contemporary space appears not to provide a moral frame for political action and I can suggest a couple of reasons why. One significant change is that Crimean Tatars no longer feel that they are the only ones who suffer from political and economic chaos, but that everyone is in a difficult position. In other words, the social cleavages are no longer primarily along ethnic lines and therefore just who to bring claims against is less clear. This is especially the case because Crimean Tatars now hold some positions of authority. The subdued response also suggests a fundamental shift in the political consciousness of Crimean Tatars. The recent immolation did not become a basis for protest because Crimean Tatars claim to have become more apolitical. Crimean Tatars stress that their first and foremost concern right now is putting bread on the table and a roof over their heads. Today, it seems, survival issues upstage politics as Crimean Tatars continue to struggle to return to their historic homeland.

Remaining Questions

One question that remains is why Musa chose what was probably the most excruciating means available to him. The persuasive power of a performance as dramatic as immolation comes to mind as a possible explanation, but is not compelling enough to account for the pain involved. His son Unus, was helpful in deciphering this.

UM: So he was a completely normal person and, like any normal person, believed in Allah, I think. 54 Meaning the man was of sound mind. To answer your question about why he did precisely as he did, burned himself, and not some other way, he apparently
decided—meaning he found the optimal way. … [laughing] We couldn’t get firearms at that time, you know. But he did precisely as a hero of the Crimean Tatar people. He proved himself like that before the Russians. He showed his heroism, courage, that he was devoted to the people. …

… even a year previous when he said, “I will burn myself,” he wanted to burn not only himself but take with him some of the authorities, you know, who were guilty of his problem. By means of fire, he wanted to take out someone from among the authorities. But by means of a noose? Well I don’t know about a second person in a noose. You can’t fit two people in one noose, it seems to me. He wanted to burn the duty officer, it just didn’t turn out that way.⁵⁵

Mamut chose a painful end because technically, his choices were limited and because he wanted to “take someone with him.” By underlining that his father not only wanted to die but to kill, Unus’ speech departs from the carnivalesque style of Redvan, and he responds in a different tone altogether. His account includes a very sardonic twist. Freud called this economized expenditure of affect—a person affected by misfortune or pain suppresses this and we get some kind of humor instead—in this case the jocular expression about a second person in a noose. This is humor at the macabre end of the spectrum, but a back-door entry to the pain that had so far been submerged under Redvan’s performance, peopled as it was by so many boisterous figures.

His statement that his father was “a completely normal person” is an important one because it is absolutely central to the Tatar interpretation of the immolation. While Soviet authorities ascribe Musa Mamut’s death to his psychopathology, Crimean Tatars locate the cause of Mamut’s death in the oppressive regime. While Mamut and Ametov’s immolations diverge with respect to both apparent intentions and effects, what they do have in common is that authorities imputed psychopathology to both instances while Tatars denied it. The unstable locus of blame shows how vulnerable suicide is to multiple if not contradictory interpretations.

Defining Suicide: “It Was a Rageful Act of Protest”

Perhaps the view that Musa Mamut’s action was within shari’a is curious. He did, after all, ignite himself. But considering how much is at stake in the cultural construction of suicide, it is no wonder that its boundaries are murky. Looking diachronically as well as cross-culturally, we can see that people have been ending their own lives since the beginning of recorded history and suicide has been condemned as well as commended. The Crimean Tatar view is therefore situated in a broader framework of thinking about death, immortality, and suicide.⁵⁶

Theorizing the significance of suicide has a deep philosophical history. Of particular importance for the case under consideration is of course that the Koran forbids suicide. The faithful Muslim awaits his destiny and does not seize it from the hands of Allah. As I pointed out earlier, however, there is a second, equally important understanding, which is that it is an individual’s duty to serve Allah. If an
individual finds that there is no other path of remaining faithful to Allah, then it is not a sin to end one’s life. This is part of a more general approach in which the focus for those seeking to defend Islam (and the Soviet regime was certainly experienced as oppressive of Islam) is action more than belief, practice rather than doctrine.

Proscriptions with regard to suicide are not unique to Islam. Christianity also forbade suicide, calling it a crime for the first time in the Council of Arles in 452 AD. It was stipulated that the mass would be withdrawn and the singing of psalms forbidden in funeral rites for suicides at the Council of Prague in 563 AD. Saint Augustine called it a form of homicide and a violation of the Decalogue Article “Thou shalt not kill.” Thomas Aquinas opposed suicide on the grounds that it was against the natural proclivities of self-preservation and a trespass against God, who has given humans life. It was Hume who “decriminalized” suicide, extricating it from the list of sins on the grounds that it is not a transgression against God as much as an act well within the agency of human beings, comparable to diverting a river from its course. Hume and other Enlightenment thinkers had begun to question people’s duty in relation to God’s will. The related political question was the rights of the individual vis-à-vis society. By the middle of the eighteenth century, these moral questions had become such a concern that most of the philosophers of the Enlightenment took the question of suicide up in some way.

With Suicide, Emile Durkheim responded directly to what he perceived to be excessive individualism in nineteenth-century social theory. Durkheim argued that, based on the regularities in the rates of suicide, it must be caused by extra-individual forces. Most of Durkheim’s work concerns the relationship of individual and society in a fundamental way. In fact, Douglas speculates that he chose to study suicide precisely because it is traditionally viewed as the epitome of an individual act. He wanted to establish that what we assume to be a highly personal phenomenon is explicable only in relation to collective inclinations.

The relevance of Durkheim’s study to understanding the case of Musa Mamut is two-fold. First, in arguing that Mamut’s act was not a suicide, Crimean Tatars share the thinking that the causes of the phenomenon must be located in the social. Second, like Durkheim, they consider that if the reasons are located in the social, then a person who is mentally healthy could end his or her life. It is on these grounds that Crimean Tatars argue that Mamut’s death is a social-structural effect of oppressive Soviet conditions. The act was a reasonable one, motivated by a desire to shake up the oppressive context and find a way out of the unacceptable situation. This is in stark contrast with the traditional view that “Suicides in the main are committed by psychologically damaged personalities.”

Mamut’s wife Zikie is among those who think that what he did was tragic, but made perfect sense. “He conceived it. He planned it, really planned to take precisely that difficult step. I don’t know how else to explain it. When we went to the raispolkom to a meeting, he also spoke of it then.” Zikie is unequivocal that the
authorities were actually responsible for her husband’s action. This is more than a search for somewhere to place blame because she is arguing that they should also be punished. Zikie is adamant about transferring the moral transgression from her family to the state. In a letter to the procuror of the Soviet Union, she suggests a criminal case be opened to investigate, try and punish the “criminals” responsible for Mamut’s death.

In addition to making a moral evaluation, Zikie helps set the emotional tone of subsequent interpretations of Mamut’s death and reinforces the heightened emotional tenor of subsequent protest. In the letter to the procuror of the Soviet Union she writes,

> It was an enraged act of protest against the anti-national discrimination of the Crimean Tatar people. The local policeman Sopriken coldbloodedly looked on, not trying to extinguish the burning, and calmly sat on his motor cycle and left. This, apparently, corresponded with the plans of the criminals, the base actions of whom led to the horror of this tragedy. The local authorities of the Crimea and the specific organs of the procurer and police are directly guilty for the death of my husband Musa Mamut 1931 y.o.b., father of three children. They traumatized him and led him to extremes without right.62

Her expression that it was “a rageful act of protest” became a narrative trope for describing the immolation. In this passage, Zikie names the emotion *gnев*, or rage, that helps define the emotional comportment of protest for Crimean Tatars. Anger and rage encompass normative evaluations of the situation, but rage carries with it the added weight of accumulated layers of resentment. Her discourse on emotion marks a formative moment that helped flavor future emotional discourses—discourses that in the late 1980s and early 1990s pervaded the context of Tatars making claims to land they lost. The emotions generated around Mamut’s demise link up with the large-scale organization of power in Crimea. Tatars wage a battle for rights and property and yet are systematically pathologized as “insane” and “unbalanced.” In the tension between psychology and sociology, reasonableness and pathology, we can see that the way suicide is defined is to a great extent an issue of power.

**Iterations Back in Time?**

Mamut is of course not the first person to accomplish a politically motivated immolation. Precisely where he got the idea, however, will remain a question. Those I asked suggested that Mamut learned it from “Danko,” a literary character created by Gorky, who rips out his heart and holds it up as a “torch” for his people. It is widely read by Soviets, but Mamut had a fourth-grade education, plus technical school. He may or may not have had exposure to this literature. Several researchers in the U.S. suggested that perhaps the origin of Mamut’s idea was Uzbek women who immolated themselves in Central Asia, where he lived in exile. But journalism about these instances was limited and the report generated by the state commission
appointed to investigate the behavior was declared top secret and the information sequestered. More importantly, self-immolation by Uzbek women differs in fundamental ways. While Mamut’s immolation drew its effectiveness from its location in the public realm, Uzbek women’s immolations are very private acts of protest. Informants also told me that even before Mamut a Crimean Tatar man by the name of Pashidov Abdurim threatened to immolate himself in a telegram he sent to Moscow, whereupon he was granted the right to legally reside in Crimea and obtain a propiska. Unfortunately, no one recalled what year this took place or even where in the Crimea he lived.

Another possibility for the genesis of the idea is Ian Palach, who immolated himself at the time of the Prague spring. This immolation was widely condemned by Warsaw Pact countries, including the Soviet Union. The news coverage of Palach’s death contains many of the same words as those that have come to posthumously describe Musa Mamut, such as “torch.” Palach’s suicide note alluded that others were ready to immolate themselves and contained the statement that “It was my honor to draw lot number one and thus I acquired the privilege of writing the first letter and starting as the first torch.” The key word is “torch,” for it was picked up and repeated by a man who immolated himself one month after Palach. In the case of Palach’s immolation, there are definitive iterations both backward and forward in time for he is believed to have emulated the Czech hero Jan Hus, a heretic who was burned at the stake in 1415.63 There are intriguing differences between the Czech and Tatar immolations, however, which I can only begin to sketch out here. Basically, while Ian Palach’s and Jan Zajíc’s prescriptive intent was aimed at the Czech people, it misfired, having the opposite of the intended effect. Instead of galvanizing the Czech people, his death sensitized them to their disenfranchisement and the failure of the Prague spring. Palach came to symbolize the grief and suffering of the Czechoslovak nation, and the political action that Palach had hoped for never really occurred.64 In contrast, Mamut never intimated that others, such as Redvan or Lenur Ametov, should do as he did, and yet he succeeded in drawing attention to the Tatar situation and stirring up his entire people. The Czech and Tatar cases had very different outcomes, which may yield other insights upon further investigation.

Memory Intersects with Testimony

Placed side by side, the 1998 interview and the 1978 recorded testimony offer a rare snapshot of recollection for us to explore. Redvan’s 1998 narration is surprisingly faithful to his 1978 testimony. The two major omissions, however, are significant. One event Redvan leaves out of the 1998 account is that before he lit the match, Musa called to the policeman, “Go away!” and then waited. When the policeman simply continued to sit on his motorcycle, Mamut proceeded toward him and lit the match. Was this pause an attempt on Mamut’s part to forestall what he had under-
taken? We cannot know whether Musa was seeking a last-minute reconciliation. We may only wonder if he was more ambivalent than he is portrayed to have been. That he wanted to spare the policeman is unlikely given Mamut’s son’s explicit statement that he wanted to take one of the authorities with him if he went. Acts that are perceived to be agentive may or may not be, even as they have social and political effects. While Mamut’s suicidal ontology will remain unclear, our opportunities for insight are not foreclosed. We can hear Redvan take up his voice years later, when it is he who tells the policeman to “Go away!” We can detect in this the temptation to project intelligibility onto Mamut’s expression even though much of his thinking will remain unknown.

Another slippage is that Redvan leaves protagonists out of his narrative in 1998 who he includes in the 1978 testimony. For example, only mid-way through the 1998 telling does Redvan suddenly remember and say, “Oh yeah, I forgot to say that Aider-agia was along.” Even though Redvan remembers that Aider was present, he fails to include him in the important moments the way he did in 1978. In Redvan’s 1978 telling, Aider is central, helping Redvan try to catch Mamut, putting out Mamut’s flames with his suit coat when he is tripped, and sitting in the back of the car holding Musa’s hand on the way to the hospital. In the 1998 version, Aider has been sidelined and it is the bedshead that Redvan grabs that puts out the flames. In the second recorded interview, it seems that Redvan is more intent on building a particular image of himself, perhaps as a result of the opportunity to be heard outside his immediate circle. The 1998 account projects a heroic image of Redvan as a fighter for the national cause. This is an identity that has taken time to build: his narrative persona has been forged incrementally.

Unlike the others, Unus makes no claims to being able to recount the event. It took coaxing on the part of the others to encourage him to speak:

UM: I forget how to talk about that.
RD: You were also there, after all.
RC: He saw it.
UM: You see, you forget. It was my father, you know.
RD: You were present.
RC: Yes, you were also here, when [your] father burned himself, he was eleven or twelve, right, Unus? And some relative of the same age was there, also a young guy. “Papa what have you done?” He cried the poor thing, and … cried out, “Papa what have you done?”
UM: Of course at that moment I could not very much understand …
ZM: (interrupting): He was still a child.
… what was taking place.
RC: Well he was eleven or twelve at the time.
UM: At that age, in my opinion, in general, it is hard for any person to understand. More truthfully, you just don’t get it mentally.65

Unus rejects the authority to interpret his father’s death, suggesting that there are things that we forget or simply don’t understand. His candor points to the
vulnerability of memory to time, even though Unus offers a number of very valuable insights in the course of the interview.

Perhaps the most crucial moment when memory intersects with testimony stems from Unus’ 1978 testimony published in *Human Torch*, which contains an important addendum. After the recorder has presumably been turned off, he suddenly remembers the last words he heard from his father were “So, did you get me?” This is arguably the “punchline” of the entire event. It condenses the years of defiance and indignation Mamut experienced into one victorious sentence. The statement underscores Mamut (and the people’s) determination not to be subjected to the will of the authorities. Unus forgets about it in the 1998 conversation and recalls it only with the prompting of Reshat, who compiled the testimony. As evident in the roles in this conversation, social hierarchy is reinstated by speakers in the conversation. This social hierarchy has the ability to inflect memory with its power and influence footing in conversation. Even though they forget and trade lines, the essential meaning of Mamut’s death still takes shape. The intersubjective mechanisms for constructing a shared memory become visible in the process of trying to recall the event in 1998 and having the 1978 testimony as a reference.

A complete analysis of memory and testimony must consider the occasion when speaker and listeners intersect in time and place. This leads me to suggest a different rendition may have emerged with a different sociospatial configuration of roles. While part of the purpose of the visit was to deliver one of Dzhemilev’s books to Mamut’s family, the speakers had also gathered on my behalf to recount what happened to Mamut. They were trying to understand me at the same time I was trying to understand them, and this certainly influenced their discourse. Subtracting any of the individuals, including myself, would have changed the emerging story. In dialogic terms, this is what insures the primacy of context. “At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions—social, historical, meteorological, physiological—that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions.”

What at first appeared as interruptions or breakdowns in “the story” became a means of examining at close magnification the way in which the idea of *vatan* or homeland is constructed not on a formal political level but on a microsocial one. Speakers’ personal aspirations manifest in their interjections and their alignment of the hero’s life with their own. They cannot be bracketed out and still remain faithful to the conversation. There is no way to extract Mamut’s story because it would miss what is most significant: there is no stable story other than the one that is emergent in the conversation. Therefore, the speakers’ conversational style provided a window on memory as a process and patriotic sentiment as a social production. This was a potent reminder to be mindful about the genres and forms expected from informants, and to be attuned to the ways in which they relate information. Not only may more information be available in this way, but the form in which it is offered is itself illuminating.
Conclusion

This interview with Mamut’s survivors demonstrates the way in which people interpret situations and produce meaning by drawing on voices of others as available frames of reference. The configuration of co-presence and absence, past and present, as well as individual and context encourage us to consider the discursive grounds of community in conversation. I draw on Irvine’s insights that emotional understandings, such as patriotism, are not necessarily abstract or symbolic formulations, such as “the nation,” but rather thoughts linked with specific social situations and goals that give them moral force and direction. Their narratives seem to tell us that if nations are imagined communities, and if homeland is socially constructed, then it is not only as the result of an elite construct. Aside from elite constructs and macro-political discourses, there is also a dialogic construction of reality that becomes apparent in conversation, which is part of shaping the emotional comportment of patriotism.

While parsed in the language of nationalism, immolation is not something that necessarily has its most profound meaning at the macro-political level. We also have to consider the level of Tatars’ everyday relationship with their land and the multiple meanings that become ascribed to places. For Tatars, homeland is not just the touchstone of a political project, but the basis of a community of memory and sentiment. As we have seen, phrases like “Homeland or Death,” become firmly embraced by means of successive iterations. Only then do they become a part of the normative values of the movement which guide action. Speech is a form of engagement that produces experience as much as describes it, in this case the Crimean Tatars’ experience of homeland.

NOTES

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5. Marianne Gullestad, *The Art of Social Relations* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1992). It is particularly appropriate to ascribe less importance to the categories “elite” and “common” in the Crimean Tatar case because a defining feature of the National Movement is its populist vision. One of the primary criteria by which the quality of an activist or leader is assessed is his or her ability to “work with the people” and “be with the people.” It is also important not to draw too distinct a line given that deportation and repatriation have acted as leveling mechanisms and have rearranged established social hierarchies.


8. See Gullestad, *op. cit.* Some information about the socioeconomic background of the informants may be helpful. Redvan was a veteran with incomplete primary education. Zikie also had minimal education and had worked as a child care provider and as an agricultural day laborer. Unus completed his education and works in a small rural cultural center. R. Dzhemilev worked as the head of a construction firm before his imprisonment for political activities. While Dzhemilev was once at the forefront of Tatar politics, he currently devotes his time to community service and writing. Earlier in his career, he had many contacts among Russian dissidents and intellectuals, but now remains at home.


11. I originally wanted to interview the informants individually, but given the tiny house in a remote village on a winter night, it would have been inappropriate to impose these circumstances. Tonkin’s observations contributed to my re-evaluation of the interview transcript and decision not to discount it: “researchers often assume that their work is doing an interview with interviewees. They have not been taught to consider that interviews are oral genres.” We may learn by accommodating. Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 54.


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what Goffman described as “someone whose position is established by the words that are spoken, someone whose beliefs have been told, someone who is committed to what the words say.” The animator, in contrast, is the “talking machine,” not a full-fledged social role but a functional role. The author is at the heart of the system as someone who “has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded.” The sentiments of patriotism are believed to be Mamut’s. Because it is Mamut’s sentiments that are believed to be originally encoded, speakers would like to establish themselves as principal in this dialogue.

19. I was reminded of this point, by an anonymous reviewer for Nationalities Papers.
24. Dzhemilev, op. cit., p. 73.
26. Interview with author, Besh-Terek, Ukraine, 2 January, 1998. RC refers to Redvan Charukov, RD to Reshat Dzhemilev; UM to Unus Mamut; ZM to Zikic Mamut; IK to Izzet Khairov and GU to the author
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. It may seem extraordinary that the community was willing to part with three of its members even though it was technically against the letter of the Koran’s law. However, the focus for those seeking to defend Islam (and the Soviet regime was experienced as oppressive of Islam) is action more than belief, practice rather than doctrine. The term shari’a deals with more than law in the strict sense, literally meaning “the way to the watering place.” Therefore it combines the sense of a means of sustenance in this world and access to the divine in the world to come. See Malise Ruthven, Islam: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 75.
32. See Dzhemilev, op. cit.


39. Again, by shifting the focus away from different groups of people to different kinds of social practice, we can avoid the difficulties that a hierarchical model of nationalism presents. Rather than extrapolate how the elite construct comes to be commonly held, we can look more closely at the emergence of cultural meanings in a variety of settings to see the emergence of patriotic sentiments. I am not trying to suggest that these sentiments are evenly distributed but that the issue has been unfortunately framed in a way that blocks clarification of the dynamics.


41. The opinion expressed by the informants is not to be confused with the author’s opinion. Alternative spelling “Jemilev.”

42. Interview with author, Besh-Terek, Crimea, 2 January, 1998.

43. Ibid.

44. According to the Migration Department of the Soviet of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, 250,000 Crimean Tatars had been repatriated as of 1 May 1998.

45. Otriad Militsii Ossobovo Naznachenia special police forces typically assigned to public disturbances and somewhat analogous to the National Guard in the United States.

46. Interview with author, Mejlis, Ukraine, 8 August, 1996.

47. The informant wishes to remain anonymous. Interview with author, Simferopol, 3 August 1995.


51. Ibid., p. 1.


53. These informants wish to remain anonymous. Interview with author, Simferopol, Ukraine, 5 December 1997.

54. By their own accounts, the Crimean Tatars are Muslims who were secularized under Soviet influence, but are now rediscovering Islam. There is a two-fold aspect to their Muslim identity: in Arabic, “Islam” means self-surrender to God as revealed through the message and life of the Prophet Muhammad. However, there is a secondary meaning of “Muslim,” which according to Ruthven shades into the first. In this understanding, a Muslim is an individual born to a Muslim father who takes on his or her parents’ confessional identity without necessarily subscribing to the beliefs and practices of the faith. See Ruthven, *op. cit.*, p. 3. This is the basis of an ambiguity inherent in Crimean Tatars’ self-identification as Muslims.


56. The word “immolation” derives from the Latin root *immolat(us)*, meaning to sprinkle holy grists in the sacrificial ceremony. See N. Subrahmanian, “Suicide,” in N. Subrahmanian, ed.,
Self-Immolation in Tamil Society (Madurai N.G.O. Colony: International Institute of Tamil Historical Studies, 1983), p. 19. The origin of the word in Latin has religious associations, but “immolation” has come to include non-religious acts as well.

62. This letter is dated 15 August 1978. It was in the possession of Zikie at the time of the interview with the author.
64. Treptow, op. cit., p. 43.
65. Interview with author, Besh-Terek, Ukraine, 2 January 1998.
66. Dzhemilev, op. cit., p. 70.
68. Tonkin, op. cit., p. 54.