

Antisemitic Doctrine in the Tatar Newspaper *Azat Kirim* (1942-1944)

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The Press as Mediator Between German Occupiers and a Crimean Tatar Population

The antisemitic propaganda disseminated by the Germans in occupied Soviet territories has recently attracted much scholarly attention.¹ As many writers have noted, the Nazis employed all available communications techniques to control information and further their interests. Print media served as one of the major instruments at their disposal. In the large swathes of the USSR occupied during World War II, Germany published more than four hundred news periodicals, in a wide range of languages.² Antisemitic doctrine was a major part of the content.

During the first few months of their occupation of Crimea, starting in November 1941, the German occupiers initiated the publication of a number of newspapers and magazines in the peninsula's towns. These included the newspapers *Deutsche Krim Zeitung* (Simferopol), *Golos Kryma* (Simferopol), *Feodosiyskiy Vestnik* (Feodosiia), *Zemledelets Tavriidy* (Simferopol), *Yuzhnyi Krym* (Yalta), and *Vestnik Kerchi* (Kerch), as well as a magazine, *Sovremennik* (Simferopol). With the exception of the first title, which was published in German, all these publications were directed at the province's ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking inhabitants, who were, according to the 1939 census, the most numerous national group. The second-largest ethnic group consisted of 218,179 Crimean Tatars, constituting 19.4 percent of the population.³

The Crimean Tatars prior to World War II were the product of the mixture and interaction, over the course of the thirteenth through twentieth centuries, of diverse

1 See the overview of the subject in Ilia Altman, "Pressa okkupatsionnaia," in Ilia Altman (ed.), *Kholokost na territorii SSSR: Entsiklopedia* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2009), pp. 803-10. A historiography survey can be found in Mikhail Tyaglyy, "Antisemitskaia propaganda na okkupirovannykh natsistami sovetских territoriiakh: istoriografiia i metodika izucheniia voprosa," *Holokost i suchasnist* 1 (2005), pp. 28-42.

2 Altman, "Pressa okkupatsionnaia," p. 803.

3 N[?]. Stepanova (ed.), *Krym mnogonatsionalnyi: Voprosy-otvety* (Simferopol: Tavriia, 1988), vol. 1, p. 72.

Turkic speaking peoples. The main component of this mixture was the group of Tatars that had formed around the Mongol clans that reached the region during the Middle Ages. They in time incorporated the Tats (themselves formed from a melding of the Oghuz tribes with the descendants of the formerly Christian Greek-speaking population of the region). Up until 1873, when the Russians conquered it, the Crimean Khanate had been an independent principality. Islam, as the state religion of the Khanate, had served as a powerful tool for consolidating the varied tribes into a single population. After 1783, the new administrative, religious, and land ownership policies of the new Russian overlords bankrupted a considerable number of owners of mid-sized and small plots, resulting in a mass emigration of Crimean Tatars to neighboring countries. Nevertheless, the original Muslim population enjoyed a certain measure of religious, juridical, and cultural autonomy under the Tavrida Muslim Spiritual Board (*Tavrisheskoe magometanskoe dukhovnoe pravlenie*), created by an edict of Czar Nicholas I on December 23, 1837. Modernization and secularization during the second half of the nineteenth century produced a lay leadership that fostered a national ideology and identity. Following the February revolution of 1917 and during the Civil War, the major part of the Crimean intelligentsia worked for the creation of a self-ruling Crimean Tatar autonomous region. These efforts were led in particular by the liberal nationalist Milli Firka or People's Party. When the Bolsheviks seized power in October 1920, they gained the support of some Crimean national activists by promising autonomy. But the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic created in 1921 only partially satisfied national aspirations. It was a territorial entity rather than an ethnic autonomy,⁴ and as an autonomous unit within the Russian Federated SSR its citizens were subject to Soviet law, including military service. In June 1941, at the beginning of the Soviet-German war, approximately 20,000 Crimean Tatars were drafted into the Red Army.

According to a German Armed Forces High Command (OKW) order of June 1941, propaganda in the occupied Soviet regions was to be effected by use of the most

4 For more on the ethnogenesis and history of the Crimean Tatars in Russian Empire see V[?]. Sidorenko, *Formirovanie krymskotatarskogo naroda*, in S[?]. Kozlov and L[?]. Chizhova (eds.), *Tiurkskie narody Kryma: karaimy, krymskie tatary, krymchaki* (Moscow: Nauka, 2003), pp. 143-7; L[?]. Roslavtseva, *Krym v sostave Rossiiskoi imperii*, in *ibid.*, pp. 183-8; Alexander Gertsen, *Krymskie tatary*, in A.G.Gertsen and I.N. Khrapunov (eds.), *Ot kimmeriitsev do krymchakov: Narody Kryma s drevneishikh vremen do kontsa XVIII veka* (Simferopol: Dolia, 2007), pp. 228-40.

common local languages.⁵ Consequently, as soon as the Wehrmacht entered Crimea it commenced preparatory activities for the publishing of newspapers that would serve to instill Nazi ideology in the local population. This was to include the non-Slavic minorities, the Tatars among them, whose political and military cooperation the Germans were particularly interested in obtaining.

The military aspect of the German interest centered upon enlisting the Tatars as volunteer troops. On January 2, 1942, a meeting in the intelligence division of the Eleventh Army was informed that Hitler had warranted the enlistment of Tatars. The army staff charged all the issues concerning recruitment to the responsibility of *Einsatzgruppe D*. The stated objectives were the “incorporation of all able-bodied Crimean Tatars into the frontline actions of the Eleventh Army on a voluntary basis, as well as creating Tatar self-defense units to combat the partisans.” The Tatars responded to the call, but largely because many were prisoners of war and enlistment was their only hope for survival. Others, however, especially those in rural areas, were persuaded to enlist by the propaganda circulated by the Muslim committees. A total of 9,255 troops were recruited, 8,684 of which were attached to the Eleventh Army. Other volunteers were deemed unfit or otherwise ineligible and sent home. In addition to these, *Einsatzgruppe D* enlisted a further 1,632 men, who were assigned to fourteen self-defense detachments in towns and villages. In July 1942, all these Tatar militias were joined into *Schuma* (auxiliary) battalions of the *Schutzmannschaft der Ordnungspolizei* (*Schutzmannschaft* was the German term for non-German collaborationist auxiliaries in the occupied lands, while *Ordnungspolizei*, or *Orpo*, referred to the regular police). Eight such battalions were staffed by November. All these Tatar forces reported to SS and Police Chief General Bezirk Taurien.⁶

The Crimean Tatar recruits were subjected to German propaganda, which included antisemitism. In mid-February 1942 they attended lectures on topics such as “Positioning at the Front Lines,” “The Life and Personality of Adolf Hitler,” and also “Bolshevism as an Oppressor of National Life: The Role of Jewry in Bolshevism.”⁷

5 Volodymyr Kosyk, *Ukraina i Nimechchina u Druhii svitovii viini* (Paris-New York-Lviv: Naukove Tovarystvo im. T. Shevchenka, 1993), p. 501.

6 For a more detailed view of the military aspects of Crimean Tatar collaboration, see Oleg Romanko, *Musulmanskie legiony vo Vtoroi mirovoi voine* (Moscow: Ast, 2004), pp. 150-60; Oleg Romanko, *Nemetskaia okkupatsionnaia politika na territorii Kryma i natsionalnyi vopros (1941-1944)* (Simferopol: Antikva, 2009), pp. 82-161.

7 National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), record group RG-242, collection T-312, roll 365, frame 7940913.

On the political side, in late December 1941-early January 1942 the Germans established Muslim Committees to represent the Crimean Tatars in the peninsula's towns and cities. The first meeting of the Simferopol Muslim Committee, chaired by Dzhemil Abdureshitov, was held on January 3, 1942. Later that month Ilmi Kermenchikli was appointed his deputy.

To instill Nazi ideology in the Crimean Tatar population, the German occupiers and their Tatar collaborators launched a newspaper, *Azat Kirim* [Liberated Crimea].⁸ Originally, and like *Golos Kryma*, another Tatar newspaper, the Simferopol City Council published *Azat Kirim*, but ownership was soon handed over to the Crimean Muslim Committee (later renamed the Simferopol Muslim Committee). The Committee was comprised of six divisions: combating theft; troop recruitment; assistance to the families of recruits; culture and religion; propaganda and inducement; and administration and financial affairs. According to *Azat Kirim*'s editor-in-chief, Izet Nafe Nuriyev, once the Muslim Committee took control of the newspaper it chose premises for its editorial offices, increased the size of the staff, arranged for the provision of paper and other materials, and facilitated regular publication.⁹

Prior to the occupation, Nuriyev had been employed as a Russian-to-Crimean Tatar translator at a Soviet newspaper, *Kryl Krym* [Red Crimea]. Upon being appointed editor-in-chief, he recruited staff and oversaw the publication of the newspaper's first three issues. But he was soon reassigned to the position of translator, which position he held until August 1943. The new editor-in-chief, Mustafa Kurtiyev, had worked before the war as manager of Krymgiz (i.e. Krymskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, the state publishing house of the Crimean A.S.S.R.) and as a translator in the Crimean People's Commissariat for Agriculture. In July 1943 Kurtiyev was appointed to a position with the Muslim Committee, and was replaced as editor-in-chief by Abdulla Kurkchi (who wrote under the penname A. Zeni), an agronomist who had worked at Krymgiz as a textbook editor and authored school textbooks in mathematics and the Crimean Tatar language. Kurkchi had also supervised *Azat Kirim* on behalf of the Muslim Committee. In December 1943 he left Crimea (apparently for Germany or Romania) and was replaced as editor-in-chief by Memet Muedinov (who wrote under the penname Memet Reshat). Muedinov, previously secretary of the editorial office,

8 Original Cyrillic spelling: Азат Кърым. Different Latin renderings appeared on the paper's masthead at different times: Asat Krim, Azat Kirim, Azat Krim, Azat Qrim.

9 Interrogation of Izet Nafe Nuriev, May 6, 1944, Archives of the Main Direction of the Security Service of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (AGUSBU), case 13135, vol. 1, p. 54.

was the newspaper's last editor. Before the occupation he had worked on the literary staff of Crimea's State Radio Committee and had been a member of the Communist Party.¹⁰ In other words, practically all those who presided over the newspaper, and who were formally in charge of its editorial policy, had been Soviet functionaries of one sort or another. When the new invaders arrived these men quickly adopted a pro-German orientation and an antisemitic ideology. These were stances they assumed in response to local events, not positions they brought with them from elsewhere.

Despite its formal subordination to the Simferopol Muslim Committee, and like its Russian-language counterparts, the German occupiers in fact controlled *Azat Kirim*.

Azat Kirim's staff answered to the security police and SD personnel of the Crimea and Taurien (a sub-district of Crimea), which was under the command of *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Paul Zapp, chief of one of the *Einsatzgruppe* D squads, *Einsatzkommando* 11a. The SD staff was located on Studencheskaia Street in Simferopol, but also had subsidiary offices in other towns. The staff was divided into several divisions, which included communications (agent activities), operations, finances and economics, human resources, and staff-company. Another division, the Third Division, oversaw Tatar committee activities in different Crimean cities and towns, churches, mosques, and municipalities, and also supervised mass media and propaganda.¹¹ Third Division was headed by *SS-Sturmbannführer* Stecker (first name unknown).

The newspaper also had to report to the German propaganda authorities. Originally this authority took the form of the U2 Propaganda Staff (or "Voraustrupp U2," as the name appears in German documents) in Simferopol, which reported to Propaganda-Division U (Propaganda-Abteilung U), which itself was part of the OKW Propaganda Department (Wehrmachtpropaganda-Abteilung). In the Siferopol Voraustrupp U2, *Sonderführer* Bruno Maurach was in charge of the press within the Crimea. Notably, it was not the Muslim Committee that set up the newspaper – that body played no role in publication of the paper in its early period. The initiative came from the German propaganda authorities. The Muslim Committee was granted authority over the paper only when nearly all the arrangements had been made. This was of great significance in determining its ideological cast and editorial policy. *Azat Kirim*'s employees were recruited with the participation of Yusupov (first name unknown), an employee of the

10 Interrogation of Izet Nafe Nuriev, May 18, 1944, AGUSBU, case 13135, vol. 1, pp. 51, 69, 70.

11 Interrogation of Emiliia Bekirova, April 9, 1945, AGUSBU, case 8801, p. 51.

U2 Propaganda Staff who, assisted by Nuriyev, the first editor-in-chief, recruited the writer and translator Rahim Tyncherov, the proofreader Seit Vadzhib Umerov, and the typist Khatish Aliyeva (the latter two had also been employed in the editorial office of *Kzyl Krym* before the war). The Propaganda Staff continued to intervene in the newsroom and supplied paper and typographic materials. Furthermore, it supplied a considerable amount of the actual material that the newspaper published (primarily, German military communiqués and political material). Furthermore, the Propaganda Staff distributed half of the newspaper's print run through its own channels.¹²

Later, in September 1942, the U2 Propaganda Staff was reorganized into a separate Crimea Propaganda Staff, subordinate to the Propaganda Division of Ukraine but required to coordinate its activities with the chief commander in Crimea.¹³ The new Staff had 28 members, headed by Lieutenant Frei (first name unknown). It oversaw the press, cinema, radio, and general cultural work with the population, as well as education, with divisions assigned to each of these fields.¹⁴ As noted, responsibility for the press lay with *Sonderführer* Bruno Maurach.

Azat Kirim made no pretense of independence – it was explicitly controlled by the German occupiers. In an article devoted to its own operations, it proclaimed: “It should be pointed out that Dr. Maurach, the chief of the propaganda Division's Editorial Office, has played an important role in managing *Azat Kirim* and in the periodical's achievements throughout the year.”¹⁵ Judging from indirect testimonies, although newspapers were monitored after publication there was no prior censorship. The State Archive of the Crimean Autonomous Republic contains a file with a selection of translations of *Azat Kirim* articles into Russian and Russian summaries of its content.¹⁶ According to the inscription on the reverse of the file, the translations were

12 Interrogation of Izet Nafe Nuriev, May 6, 1944, AGUSBU, case 13135, vol. 1, p. 54.

13 Copies of orders, circulars and directives of the German Propaganda Headquarters in the Crimea on the ideological indoctrination of the population, State Archives of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (DAARK), P-156/1/26.

14 For more details on the staff's structure see Romanko, *Nemetskaia okkupatsionnaia politika*, pp. 41-4.

15 *Azat Kirim* 4 (January 12, 1943).

16 My analysis of material from *Azat Kirim* is based on translations from this file, as well as on the basis of selective translations made in 1947 for Soviet state security bodies, preserved in a separate file in the State Archive of the Crimean Autonomous Republic. Neither file appears in the archive's catalogue. One more source of Russian translations from the newspaper is a collection of the translations made as part of

performed for Mr. Dr. Maurach, 6 Pushkinskaya Street, apt. 12. The translator's name, Ibrahimov, appears a number of times.¹⁷ Crimean publications were also monitored by the Third Department of the Security Police and SD in Crimea; the task was assigned to a German, *Unterscharführer* Krachkovskiy, who received translations from a freelancer, Emiliia Bekirova, in August and September 1943. Bekirova later testified under Soviet interrogation that "I summarized all articles orally ... to Krachkovskiy, who submitted to me in writing [a list of] the articles he wished to have translated [in full] into German... Krachkovskiy was mainly interested in articles concerning the activities of the municipal administration, all national committees, mosques, churches, and the press."¹⁸

In the summer of 1943, the newspaper, which was published twice a week, had a circulation of 15,000.¹⁹ In its first year, 1942, all material appeared in the Crimean Tatar language, using the Cyrillic alphabet. Later a separate page offered materials transcribed into the Latin alphabet.²⁰ In 1944, the newspaper's final page appeared in Arabic script.

Azat Kirim's Propaganda Model and Antisemitic Doctrine

Azat Kirim proclaimed to its readers that the modern moment, as manifested in the war, was a unique opportunity to reinstate Crimean Tatar culture, religion, traditional values, and, eventually, the national sovereignty of the Crimean Tatar people on the

the "NS-Besatzungspresse in der Sowjetunion, 1941-44" project, run by the Seminar für Osteuropäische Geschichte of Heidelberg University, headed by Heinz-Dietrich Löwe.

17 The Crimean historian Nataliia Iablonovskaia reaches the opposite conclusion, namely that prior censorship was exercised, but she provides only one example: a précis of issue 78 lists a news brief about the importance of using the Crimean Tatar language in schools, but the article did not appear in the issue (see N. Iablonovskaia, "Okkupatsionnaia gazeta 'Azat Krym' (1942-44): natsionalnaia pressa v kontekste informatsionnykh voin," *Kultura narodov Prichernomoria* 2:57 (2005), p. 123). But the article's omission could have other explanations and does not prove prior censorship.

18 Interrogation of Emiliia Bekirova, April 9, 1945, AGUSBU, case 8801, pp. 23, 51.

19 Romanko, *Nemetskaia okkupatsionnaia politika*, p. 159.

20 The Crimean Tatar language was written using the Arabic alphabet until 1928, when the Latin alphabet was adopted. In 1939 the Cyrillic alphabet replaced the Latin. The move to Latin characters may have been intended to accord with the practice of the pan-Turkish movement and to dissociate it culturally from the Soviet legacy.

Crimean peninsula. Sovereignty would be realized in the form of an autonomous polity in a binding union with the German “liberators” of the peninsula from the Jewish-Bolshevik regime. In January 1943, an editorial dedicated to the newspaper’s first anniversary stated:

This newspaper has pursued one aim: to explain to our nation how to restore our land, which was devastated by the Bolsheviks in a short period of time, and how to get down to building a new life.... *Azat Kirim*, which has become the guiding beacon for our [Muslim] Committees, has played a great role in the voluntary enlistment of Crimean Tatar youth in the German Army....

At the same time, *Azat Kirim* has consistently attended to the issues of the activities of schools, issues of the alphabet ... [it] provides assistance in resolving religious questions ... attends to agricultural affairs.... Without high crop rates, we will not be able to help the victorious German army restore the land ravaged by the Jewish Bolsheviks.

Azat Kirim deems its primary task to be to convey to the population all information and orders of the German high command....

During its year of existence, the newspaper has not fallen under the influence of any criminal groups or political movements. Its activities have been directed at the national and political growth of our people and at organizing honest labor. This is what the German army that has liberated us from the Bolshevik oppression required of us. We believe that we have received freedom of printed speech only owing to the kindness of our liberators, for which we offer thanks to Führer Adolf Hitler. [Signed: M.K.]

The German propaganda disseminated by *Azat Kirim* shared a characteristic feature with other periodicals managed by the occupation authorities, such as the Russian-language *Golos Kryma*: antisemitism was an inseparable part of the ideology that the newspaper promoted; standard Nazi antisemitic tropes appeared regularly in nearly every issue.

The wartime periodicals of Galicia, Bukovina, and Transcarpathia, where the Jewish population survived under German occupation for a relatively long time, published a considerable amount of regulations and directives (information sheets, announcements, orders) directed at the Jewish population. But the press in the Crimean

peninsula, *Azat Kirim* in particular, had no need to publish such material. The region's Jewish population had quickly been annihilated;²¹ the newspaper's first issue appeared after the annihilation of the Jews in virtually all of Crimea's municipalities. There were no Jews who needed to be informed of the Germans' commands, and virtually no Jews left to inform the rest of the population about what had happened to them. All the Jews of Simferopol had been shot three weeks before the paper was launched, but *Azat Kirim* felt no need to refer to this. This being the case, the paper could focus on the task of indoctrinating the Tatars

The most common antisemitic motif that the paper offered to its readers, which was also standard in the press of other conquered regions of the USSR, was the equivalence of Jewry and Bolshevism, in all its variants: the Jews had produced Marxism; Bolshevism was Jewry's modern incarnation; Judeo-Bolsheviks are the exploiters of nations, and so on.²² The core concept in a considerable number of these texts is the contrast between the small parasitic "Judeo-Bolshevik elite," on the one hand, and "the misled, repressed, and exploited Crimean Tatar people," on the other. Occasionally the critique of the Soviet political system also took on an anti-Russian and anti-imperialistic tinge.²³ One characteristic example of the paper's antisemitic propaganda appeared on April 21, 1942, under the headline "Black Days Under the Red Flag," by A. Zeni:

21 For more details on the Final Solution in Crimea, see Gitel Gubenko, *Kniga pechali* (Simferopol: Redotdel krymskogo upravleniia po pechati, 1991), and Mikhail Tyaglyy, *Mesta massovogo unichtozheniia evreev Kryma v period natsistskoi okkupatsii poluostrova (1941-1944): Spravochnik* (Simferopol: BETs Khesed Shimon, 2005).

22 "For Bolsheviks who received training from the old Jew Karl Marx, and who lived in a Bolshevik state, required all the nations, excluding Jews, to be Bolshevik in meaning and nationalistic in form." Unsigned editorial. "K bratiam, zashchishchaiushchim Rodinu" [To the Brothers who are defending our Motherland], *Azat Kirim* 16 (March 17, 1942).

23 "It is now very clear that Russian Bolsheviks are the most drastic of enemies of the Muslim world. There is no difference between General Potemkin, the faithful servant of Catherine [the Great], who, by way of endless ruses, lies, slander, and threat, snatched the key to the Green Island from the hand of the suffering Tatar nation, and Stalin, who gained dictatorial power in Russia by selling Crimea to the Jews." Unsigned editorial, "Pobeda germanskogo naroda oznachaet osvobozhdenie vsego Vostochnogo mira," *Azat Kirim* 17 (March 20, 1942).

If this was not a Jewish, but indeed a worker and peasant state, how could it have been that all power was gathered in the hands of the Jews; that the Jews enjoyed all wealth, high awards, positions and profitable workplaces, spacious homes, the most fertile plots of land and other such things, all in Jewish hands? Why, as the saying goes, did the donkey toil but the horse eat? ... If that state were truly the state of workers and farmers, why did the Jews and commissars have all the high positions? ... One can pose thousands of such questions but there is just one answer: this country was not the state of workers and farmers; it was a state in the hands of one group – it was a Jewish state.

Another characteristic example appeared on June 25, 1943, under the title “The Meeting of Bakhchisarai Intelligentsia,” by E. Murtaza:

In Bakhchisarai, on June 10, the mutual meeting of the town and district intelligentsia was held in the Front-Teatr cinema building. The chairman of the district and town council attended. After opening the meeting, the chairman of the town and district council spoke about the military meaning of total war and the role of the intelligentsia in it, and then gave the floor to Mr. Abibulla Nuri, who gave a speech on the topic “Jews are the Enemies of all Peoples.” In that speech, given in the Tatar language, Mr. Nuri proved by virtue of a number of examples that Jews are indeed bloodthirsty savages. He called on the intelligentsia to participate in the total war against Bolshevism.²⁴

In some texts, a specific official of Jewish origin, depicted with stereotypically Jewish traits, was proclaimed to be the supposed power behind the Soviet regime. His high position was interpreted as yet further proof that Jewry and Bolshevism were the same. As in other newspapers of the occupation period, *Azat Kirim*'s favorite targets for this purpose were party and state figures of Jewish origin, such as Minister of Railways Lazar Kaganovich,²⁵ or the high-ranking diplomat Ivan Maisky.²⁶ Churchill and

24 *Azat Kirim* 51 (147) (June 25, 1943).

25 See the item “Chufut Kaganovich kene demir el transportunyn bashinda” [Jew Kaganovich is Again the Chief of the Railway System], *Azat Kirim* 19 (March 6, 1943).

26 See the item “Eudii Maiskii ne isteï?” [What Does the Jew Maiskii Want?], *Azat Kirim* 17 (Feb. 27, 1943).

Roosevelt were represented as warmongers serving Jewish goals and as the puppets of “world Jewry.”²⁷

Antisemitic phraseology was also used as a secondary element in combination with other propaganda techniques. Thus for example, to encourage more Crimean Tatar enlistment in the auxiliary volunteer forces, the newspaper ran a feature headlined “Dzheli the Volunteer.” It told the story of a 54-year-old resident of the village of Baksan who served as an auxiliary despite his relatively advanced age. “I – uncle Dzheli says – enlisted as a volunteer. I will fight shoulder-to-shoulder with the German brothers against the enemy and will purge Crimea of Jewish-Bolshevik bandits.”²⁸

News Briefs

Azat Kirim, like other newspapers in the occupied Soviet territories, regularly published brief items of an antisemitic nature relating to the Jews in Europe, the United States, and Palestine. All these items clearly trace back to a single source: the Wehrmacht’s propaganda operations. A sampling of such pieces in *Azat Kirim* brings to light such headlines as “No More Jewish Pharmacies in Bulgaria,” “A Court Against Jewish Profiteers” (in France), and “Identification of the Jews in Budapest.”²⁹

While such pieces appeared throughout *Azat Kirim*’s years of publication, none of them ever referred to the fact that the Jews were being physically annihilated. At most, they mentioned anti-Jewish legislation, the confinement of Jews in ghettos and concentration camps, and deportations. The information was conveyed in a biased matter, with considerable sympathy for the persecution of the Jews, and the headlines were often pejorative. Clearly, the intent was both propagandistic – to create support for the German war effort – and antisemitic – to fan hatred of the Jews. Their purpose was to impress on the Crimean Tatar community that Jewry was no less a peril to them and the world than was Soviet Communism.

27 See the article “Cherchillnyn dzenki – chufutlarnyn dzenkidir” [Churchill’s War is a Jewish War], *Azat Kirim* 14 (Feb. 16, 1943).

28 *Azat Kirim* 23 (April 10, 1942).

29 “Bulgariada artyk eudii aptekalary iok,” *Azat Kirim* 1 (January 11, 1942); “Chufut spekulantlarynyn muakemesi,” *Azat Kirim* 18 (March 24, 1942); “Budapeshtte chufutlarny arashtyruv,” *Azat Kirim* 19 (March 27, 1942).

The Jewish Question in Crimea

In contrast with the Russian-language *Golos Kryma*, the antisemitism on display in *Azat Kirim* was closely tied to local Crimean events, politics, society and history. There were obvious historical reasons for this. In the 1930s the Soviets utterly repressed what remained of the Crimean Tatar national movement.³⁰ It was not, then, difficult for the Germans to discredit the Soviet regime in the eyes of the Crimean Tatar community. But they deliberately chose to give the Soviets a Jewish face. The choice was a successful one.

To explain why, some historical background must be provided. During the final stage of the Civil War a considerable part of the Crimean Tatars supported the Bolsheviks, primarily because Milli Firka's left wing, headed by Veli Ibrahimov, believed the Bolsheviks' pledge to grant them territorial autonomy. Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, an advisor to Stalin (who was then the people's commissar of nationalities), made the promise during a visit to Crimea. The Bolsheviks kept their promise, creating a Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (A.S.S.R.), but not in the way the Crimean Tatars had expected. The National-Bolshevist leadership of the autonomous republic continued to pursue the Milli Firka program. The vacant lands of the Crimean steppe were claimed by landless Tatars of the southern, mountainous part of the peninsula, who had suffered considerably during the famine of 1921. Their claim was backed by the government of the Crimean A.S.S.R., headed by the chairman of its Central Executive Committee [KrymTsIK] Veli Ibrahimov, previously of Milli Firka, who had become a Bolshevik.

The Soviet *korenizatsiia* (indigenization or nativization) policy was intended to support and foster non-Russian ethnic cultures and to provide proportional representation in the local administrative apparatus of what the Soviets called "national minorities." As a result of this policy, Tatars in Crimea were appointed in large numbers to local administrative, educational, economic, and cultural bodies and institutions, sometimes to an extent that led to charges that *korenizatsiia* in the Crimea was pursued for the benefit of the Tatars at the expense of other ethnic groups. Most observers agree that the autonomous republic, which began as a territorial entity, gradually transformed into a Crimean Tatar national polity.³¹

30 On the gradual suppression and repression of the Crimean Tatars and their culture, see Alan Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), pp. 130-49; Dmitrii Ursu, *Ocherki istorii kultury krymskotatarskogo naroda (1921-1941)* (Simferopol: Tavriia-plus, 1999), p. 144.

31 For a survey of various accounts of this process, see Bryan Glyn Williams, *The*

To the surprise and consternation of the Crimean Tatars and their leadership in the autonomous republic, in 1924 the central government in Moscow began resettling Jews from Ukraine and Belarus on the steppes that the Tatars claimed. This led to a confrontation between Moscow and the Soviet agencies responsible for implementing the new policy,³² on the one hand, and on the other KrymTsIK, which insisted on the repatriation of hundreds of thousands of Tatar expatriates from Turkey and other countries to Crimea.³³

Many Tatar leaders voiced opposition to the “Jewish project”; for example, Chairman of the Crimean Council of the People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom), Osman Deren-Aierly, People’s Commissar of Agriculture, Umer Ibrahimov, and KrymTsIK Chairman, Veli Ibrahimov. But it was not only the Tatar leadership that opposed the project. Crimean Communist Party Secretary Ivan Nosov maintained that it was more reasonable to resettle the Jews in Ukraine and Belarus than in the Crimea, which would have “negative consequences.” The local leadership argued that there was not sufficient land to allocate to Jewish settlers, and that the project’s “primary goals [should rather be] provision of the necessary facilities for the local agricultural population, moving

Crimean Tatars: The Diaspora Experience and the Forging of a Nation (Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 2001), pp. 355-60.

- 32 KOMZET (Committee for Land Provision of the Laboring Jews of the Nationalities Council Presidium, USSR Central Executive Committee) was an organization with objectives that encompassed resettlement and placement of Jews on plots of land, determining what lands were vacant and open for settlement, taking measures for the agricultural development of resettled persons, and so on. It was established in 1924 and dissolved in 1938. OZET (All-Union Society for Land Provision of Laboring Jews in the USSR) was an organization that promoted the resettlement and economic establishment of Jewish settlers; it collected funds in the USSR and abroad, and provided technical, agronomic, medical, and cultural support to the settlers. It was founded in 1924 and dissolved in 1938.
- 33 For more details on these ethno-political contradictions in the context of the Soviet state-sponsored resettlement of the Jews to the Crimea, see V[?]. Chebotareva, “Sotsialnye protivorechiia natsionalnoi politiki v Krymskoi ASSR v 1920-e gody,” *Voprosy istorii* 12 (2006), pp. 25-43; Allan Kagedan, *Soviet Zion: The Quest for a Russian Jewish Homeland* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), pp. 80-7; Gennadii Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina: Vlast i antisemitizm* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2001), pp. 95, 96, 111; Williams, *Crimean Tatars*, pp. 364-71; Jonathan L. Dekel-Chen, *Farming the Red Land: Jewish Agricultural Colonization and Local Soviet Power, 1924-1941* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 98-100.

it from land-poor and especially cramped districts into land-rich ones; only the land remaining after this should be used for [Jewish] resettlement.”³⁴ On February 28, 1925, KrymTsIK and the Sovnarkom of the Crimean A.S.S.R. issued an order prohibiting the grant of land to Jewish migrants.³⁵

But these measures were not fruitful. Nor were the visits to Moscow by the Crimean leadership in an attempt to convince the central authorities to first see to the needs of the local population. On the initiative of KOMZET (the Committee for Land Provision of the Laboring Jews of the Nationalities Council Presidium, USSR Central Executive Committee), the Jewish colonization of Crimea attracted the attention of the Politburo in Moscow, which established a commission to investigate the “Jewish land management issue.” Based on the commission’s report, on March 18, 1926 the Politburo resolved to “stay the course in the creation of the autonomous Jewish entity [in the Crimean A.S.S.R.] if resettlement proceeds in a positive fashion.”

The Kremlin decided to break the resistance of the local Crimean leadership, beginning with Ibrahimov. On January 28, 1928, an extraordinary session of the KrymTsIK resolved “to remove Veli Ibrahimov from the position of head of KrymTsIK, and to exclude him from membership of KrymTsIK Reference Missing.”³⁶ Criminal charges were subsequently filed against Ibrahimov, and he was tried and sentenced to death. Seventeen more Tatar activists were also arrested. According to an official report on the investigation, “Ibrahimov himself, as well as some other leading officials, directed the anti-Jewish agitation; when recruiting followers among the young Tatar workers, Ibrahimov and his accomplices declared that Crimea was undergoing ‘Jewification’ [*evreizatsiia*].”³⁷

Ibrahimov’s declaration seems to have represented the popular mood on the peninsula. The Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU) reported that “Jewish resettlement in the Crimea has roused the resistance of the native [*korennoe*] population (Russians and Tatars). The wealthy peasants [*kulaki*] and prosperous elements, and in some places the representatives of the national intelligentsia, are stirring up the hostility of the native population toward the Jewish migrants, spreading rumors that Crimea will soon become a Jewish republic... Antisemitic feelings are also evident among the employees of the Soviet apparatus [*sovrabotniki*], especially among the Tatars.”³⁸ The

34 Chebotareva, “Sotsialnye protivorechiia natsionalnoi politiki,” p. 29.

35 Dekel-Chen, *Farming the Red Land*, p. 99.

36 Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*, p. 141.

37 Chebotareva, “Sotsialnye protivorechiia natsionalnoi politiki,” p. 36.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

OGPU report states that Ibrahimov's arrest had "provoked lively discussions among all strata of the Crimean population. Among the Tatars the prevailing sentiment is that the 'Russian attack on the Tatars has begun.' Antisemitic sentiments are manifest: 'This is only the Jews' fault.' There is strong discontent among Tatar students (the Crimean *rabfak*, the Tatar Pedagogical college), Tatar intelligentsia, merchants."³⁹

The confrontation, which later became known as the Veli Ibrahimov affair [*Veliibrahimovshchina*], was a major cause of the Soviet leadership's reluctance to share the right to set land tenure policy priorities with the local Crimean government and to fulfill those promises that had been given when local support was critically important for the Bolsheviks. The following year, as many as 3,500 prominent figures in the Crimean Tatar intelligentsia were accused of "bourgeois nationalism" and sentenced to death or exile.⁴⁰ Later, in the first half of the 1930s, the Kremlin reaffirmed this tendency on a broader scale when it gradually suppressed the opponents of the *korenizatsiia* policy.

The resultant anti-Soviet and antisemitic sensitivities were to be exploited under German rule by the Crimean Tatar administrative, cultural, and educational leaders. The Communist attempt to move Jews into the region and subsequent Tatar resistance, resulting in the decimation of its intellectual and governing elite and the repression of the entire community, had primed the Crimean Tatars to accept German antisemitism. These themes often appeared as a leitmotif in *Azat Kirim* and other occupation-era newspapers on the peninsula. Reporting to the Eleventh Army staff on the recruitment of Crimean Tatars into the Wehrmacht and self-defense forces, *Einsatzgruppe D* reported:

Up until 1926-1927, the Soviets demonstrated minimal respect toward Tatar traditions, but after the Jews started settling in the territory, Tatars began protesting, which led to the suppression of Tatar elements, especially due to the fact that they devoutly clung to their faith, language, culture, and lifestyle. Their religious activities were blatantly suppressed. All of this is the main cause of the fact that Tatars, predominantly a peasant population, have been alienated from Bolshevism.⁴¹

39 Ibid., p. 35.

40 Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*, p. 141.

41 G[?]. Litvin, "Krymsko-tatarskie formirovaniia. Dokumenty Tretiego Reikha svidetelstvuiut", *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 3 (1991), p. 91.

As this passage shows, the German authorities simplistically conflated two different processes. The first was the result of local events, namely the Soviet project of Jewish migration into the Crimea and the attempts to prevent it by the local, predominantly Tatar, elite. The second occurred later and was not specific to Crimea; rather, it took place in all ethnic regions of the Soviet empire. This was the Kremlin's reversal of its *korenizatsiia* policy, which Stalin feared had fostered "bourgeois nationalism." In other words, it was not Jewish resettlement in Crimea that provoked "the suppression of Tatar elements." But such a simplistic and linear account was very useful for the Germans' propaganda purposes.

Below, I offer two selections from articles reflecting these themes, together with their original titles:

Resettlement of Jews in Crimea

In 1922-1923 the Jews began to move into Crimea. The most fertile lands ... were expropriated by the Soviet authorities for use by the Jews. The OZET organization and KOMZET committee were created to promote Jewish resettlement. In order to place the Jews in these territories, and with the participation of these organizations, attempts were made to raise huge sums from world Jewry and, first of all, from American millionaires. The Bolshevik-Jewish government made huge efforts in this direction. What results did they expect from this resettlement?

Despite the fact that the Communist government sought to conceal this information on Jewish resettlement in Crimea, it became widely known not only to the Crimean people but also to the people of foreign countries. The measures undertaken by OGPU were clear evidence that the intention was to expel the Tatars from Crimea and create a Jewish republic there...

When they became aware of this plan, at its initial stage, the Crimean Tatar intelligentsia embarked on a struggle against Jewish resettlement.... Indubitably, if there had been no such resistance by the intelligentsia, the Jewish republic of Crimea would have been created long ago, the Tatars driven out of the Crimea, and their name expunged from the history of the peninsula. Naturally, this struggle could not be without victims. The Crimean Tatar intelligentsia lost many of its members. Veli Ibrahimov and his companions perished in

this campaign. Some of them were shot while the others were exiled to Siberia and the Urals, where they died.⁴²

Another article from *Azat Kirim* is headlined “Was there Equality and Justice under Bolshevik Rule?” It relates how the Tatars were exiled from their homeland and the Jews settled there instead. It lists the victims of this Bolshevik policy and concludes with a description of the terror inflicted on the Tatars by what it describes as the Judeo-Bolshevik government.⁴³

And a further excerpt from *Azat Kirim*:

Black Days Under the Red Flag (continued)

The first Chairman of the Executive Committee was Veli Ibrahimov. Making every effort not to allow the fate of his motherland and his people to slip into the hands of the Jews, and fighting against all tricks, threats, and deceptions from Moscow, this son of his nation consequently fell victim to Bolshevism and the Jews. Bolshevism, which has since 1924 set itself the aim of turning our beautiful Crimea into a Jewish republic, wished to use the head of the independent Crimean Republic, Veli Ibrahimov, as an instrument of the Jews. When this fell through (for Veli Ibrahimov devoted himself utterly to cooperation with the underground party Milli Firka in Crimea, so as to keep the Jews out of the peninsula), in order to overthrow him and replace him with an obedient tool and to undermine Veli Ibrahimov’s authority with the Tatar population, they began arresting, arraigning, and deporting people who were close to him, while making ample use of slanderous lies from the lips of apostates of the Tatar people.⁴⁴

In an article titled “You Were Sent to Us by God (Words of a Peasant),” Gani Abdzhuldzhelil from the village of Borulcha in the Karasubazar district related how, in late February 1926, he attended a meeting of the Crimean Government Conference. One of the important issues discussed at the conference was the resettlement of Jews

42 *Azat Kirim* 5 (February 6, 1942).

43 *Azat Kirim* 12 (March 3, 1942).

44 *Azat Kirim* 27 (April 24, 1942). The first part of the article was published in the issue of April 21 (see above).

to Crimea. At the time, the People's Commissar for Land Affairs was Umer Ibrahim. At the meeting, Abdzhuldzhelil related, Ibrahim expressed his astonishment at the allocation of Crimean lands to the Jews when the Tatars still needed land; and for this, Abdzhuldzhelil wrote, he was thanked, and told that he had been sent by God.⁴⁵

The Authors

Fifteen writers wrote on the "Jewish question" in *Azat Kirim*.⁴⁶ It has not been possible, so far at least, to discover why they agreed to cooperate with the German occupiers in this way, or what ultimately became of them. None of them are listed in the biographical dictionary *Prominent Figures in Crimean Tatar Culture (1921-1941)*, which was published in Simferopol in 1999 and contains information on 188 persons. Presumably, then, these writers were not men whose political views were well known prior to the war. Their anti-Jewish stance apparently did not date from the Soviet period but was rather formed during the occupation and under the influence of Nazi ideology and propaganda. Indeed, some of the names may well be aliases. We do, however, have some information about four of them.

Mustafa Kurtiyev, *Azat Kirim*'s editor, signed his pieces M.K. During the revolution he was a member of Milli Firka. Dzhemil Abdureshitov presided over the Simferopol Muslim Crimean Tatar Committee. Two other writers, Osman Memetov and Ilmi Kermenchikli, were Abdureshitov's deputies. Kermenchikli was released from a German concentration camp for prisoners of war (the so-called "potato quarter" in Simferopol) through Abdureshitov's intervention in late 1941. He served as director of the Muslim Committee's transport department and then, following brief service in the Simferopol SD security unit, was appointed chief of the Muslim Committee's political bureau.⁴⁷

Not all the antisemitic articles published in *Azat Kirim* were original, however. This is primarily true of the news briefs, which were published also in Russian-language

45 *Azat Kirim* 43 (139) (May 28, 1943).

46 The following writers addressed the Jewish question in *Azat Kirim*: Dzhamil Abdureshitov (Abdureshit), Abulasiz Efendi, Chalbash, M[?]. Mustafaev, N[?]. Seidametov, Zia Efendi, Ismail Khatip-Zade, Ilmi Kermenchikli, Shulin Kadir, Memet Osman, Sh[?]. Liatifov, A[?]. Zeni, Mustafa Menkeev, Abdudzhelil Gani, E[?]. Murtaza.

47 Interrogation of Ilmi Kermenchikli, November 12, 1944, AGUSBU, case 20347, p. 15; interrogation of Ilmi Kermenchikli, January 12, 1977, AGUSBU, case 20423, vol. 5, p. 231.

occupation newspapers on the peninsula, and in other Soviet territories occupied by the Germans. These items were based on bulletins put out by the Reich Propaganda Ministry.⁴⁸ *Azat Kirim*'s editor either translated them directly from the bulletins or took them from other newspapers that had already published them. For example, a brief with the title "No More Jewish Pharmacies in Bulgaria," which appeared in *Azat Kirim* on January 11, 1942, had appeared three days earlier in the Russian newspaper *Golos Kryma*; "Churchill's War is a Jewish War," which appeared in *Azat Kirim* on February 16, 1943, had already been published in *Feodosiiskii Vestnik* on January 28, 1943. Likewise, the essay "Der jüdische Weltpolyp" appeared in *Ostraum-Artikeldienst* on February 3, 1942,⁴⁹ in *Golos Kryma* on March 12, 1942, and in *Azat Kirim* on March 17, 1942.

Cooperation Between Azat Kirim and Other Crimean Mass Media in Covering the Local "Jewish Question"

Occupation-era Russian-language newspapers in Crimea published on Crimean Jews and Jewish interaction with the non-Jewish population on the peninsula much more rarely than did *Azat Kirim*. Of *Golos Kryma*'s 288 issues, only four contain articles that refer to the local Jewish community as a whole. The rest of those articles that mention the Jews are about events elsewhere – in the United States or other Soviet lands, or the Kremlin – or about Jews in the past. Of the four issues that do address the topic, three take up, to differing extents, the theme of Jewish agricultural settlements in Crimea during the 1920s and 1930s.⁵⁰

On April 16, 1942, *Golos Kryma* printed an article with the title "The Jewish Republic in the Crimea." The article begins: "In 1921, Crimea was pronounced the Tatar Autonomous Republic...." This, of course, was a false statement, for the Crimean autonomous region was a territorial, and not an ethnic entity – as evidenced by its name, the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. One of the main

48 For more on *Ostraum-Artikeldienst*, and also on both direct and indirect borrowings from it by Crimean papers, see Mikhail Tyaglyy, "K voprosu o natsistskoi antisemitskoi propaganda na okkupirovannykh territoriiakh SSSR: novye istochniki," *Golokost i suchasnist* 4 (2002), pp. 6-7.

49 Central State Archives of the Highest Authorities of Ukraine (TsDAVOU), 3206/6/10/63.

50 For an analysis of articles addressing the "Jewish Question" in Russian-language papers of occupied Crimea, see Mikhail Tyaglyy, "The Role of Antisemitic Doctrine in German Propaganda in the Crimea," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, V18, N3 (2005), p. 421-59.

claims made by the article was that Jews, even after receiving fertile land on the peninsula, appeared to be unable to perform agricultural work. The consequence had been a decline in the Crimean economy prior to the war. “The Tatar Autonomous Republic,” stated the author, who signed with the alias “Alpha,” “was becoming a fiction; like a cancerous tumor, the Jewish republic emerged on its body and started developing rapidly.”⁵¹ Presumably their colleagues at *Azat Kirim* had suggested the theme and the materials of this article to the editorial board of *Golos Kryma*. With its Russian-speaking readership, such an article could achieve two goals. First, it offered another approach to the “Jewish question,” linking it to local events. Second, it recasted the *Azat Kirim* story of Jews against Crimean Tatars as a story of Jews against all Crimeans.

The article most probably pleased the German propaganda bodies since, its blatant perversion of the facts notwithstanding, it had a dynamic narrative and stylistic flair. Issue 32 of *Ostraum-Artikeldienst*, a collection of articles made available to local media outlets by the Eastern Division of the Ministry for Propaganda in Berlin, dated June 26, 1942, featured an article titled “Jewish Settlements in Crimea.”⁵² It looks as if the editor in Berlin abridged the *Golos Kryma* story, eliminating the most problematic claims (for example, the one concerning the Crimean Tatar Republic in the Crimea), as well as slightly recasting the original argumentation. Rather than opposing the Jews to the Crimean Tatars (which would not interest non-Crimeans), it made the Jews out as the nemesis of the peninsula’s erstwhile *volksdeutsche* German inhabitants, who had settled there in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but had been deported by Stalin in August 1941. By “their work and organizational skills,” it was asserted in the version that appeared in *Ostraum-Artikeldienst*, the Germans colonists “favored the cultural development and contributed to the welfare of the Crimean peninsula.”⁵³ The basic point, however, was preserved: even in the best circumstances, Jews cannot perform agricultural labor. This was an opportunity for Nazi propagandists to revive an old antisemitic stereotype, and to ostensibly offer empirical proof.

Conclusions

Like most print media in German-occupied Soviet territories, *Azat Kirim* covered the “Jewish question” and employed antisemitic rhetoric. Since there were no Jews in Crimea during the paper’s lifetime, its articles on the Jews had nothing to do with

51 “Evreiskaia respublika v Krymu,” *Golos Kryma* 31 (37) (April 16, 1942).

52 Russian State Archives of Social and Political History (RGASPI), 17/125/178/152.

53 Tyaglyy, “K voprosu o natsistskoi antisemitskoi propaganda,” pp. 6-7.

informing the public. They were pure propaganda. Some articles were devoted solely to the Jews, while others integrated antisemitic themes into broader contexts, such as presenting the Soviet regime, with the Jews as its mainstay, as foreign and hostile to the Crimean Tatar people. The articles in *Azat Kirim* that touch upon the Jews may be classified into three groups: (1) items borrowed, unchanged, from sources such as German compilations of articles prepared for the press on the Eastern territories, or from another newspapers, (2) texts borrowed but revised and adapted for the local readership, (3) original material written exclusively for the newspaper. In comparison with Russian-language periodicals of the occupation period in Crimea, *Azat Kirim*'s antisemitic content displayed a number of peculiar features.

Azat Kirim never adopted racist Nazi rhetoric depicting the Jews as malignant, or depicting Judaism as the enemy of Islam (or Christianity). The absence of such a racist discourse might be explained, first, by the fact that Crimean Tatar writers and readers were unaware of the racial theory professed by the Nazis, and, second, by the further fact that Nazi ideology and propaganda trumpeted the inferior racial status of Oriental, and particularly Turkic peoples as well. The lack of religious antisemitism in the form of the representation of the Jews as the enemies of Islam might be due to the fact that the newspaper did not serve as the mouthpiece of a powerful and influential Muslim religious authority. No such body existed in Crimea under Nazi rule.⁵⁴ It goes without saying that from time to time the paper did address issues relating to the "religious renaissance" of Islam, but its dominant categories and concepts were those of secular nationalism, and the Jews were presented accordingly in national and not religious terms.

54 Numan Çelebi Cihan, the last Crimean mufti was shot by the Bolsheviks in 1918, and no successor was elected. Under Nazi rule, Crimean Tatar activists tried to obtain German permission to reestablish the office of Crimean Mufti. But they did not succeed, for the Germans preferred to deal with politically and religiously fragmented and decentralized Tatar communities, and understood perfectly well that a mufti would serve the political purposes of the Tatar nationalists, and not just their cultural and religious needs. For more details on the attempts to reestablish the office, see Romanko, *Nemetskaia okkupatsionnaia politika*, pp. 91-4. *Azat Kirim*'s issue of Feb. 17, 1942 included an announcement headed "From the Religious Governing Authority" [*Ot Religioznogo upravleniia*], which stated that "the Crimean Muslims who, as a result of liberation [from "Jewish-Bolshevik oppression", as stated a few lines above], have regained the ability to express themselves again, have created the All-Crimean Muslim Committee." But the Germans quickly prohibited the Simferopol Muslim Committee from making any attempt to control and manage Tatar life throughout the peninsula. The authority of the new religious board was thus limited to the municipality.

But this absence of religious antisemitism was more than compensated for by the numerous articles depicting Jewry as the moving force behind the establishment and persistence of the Soviet political and state system. In the Crimean Tatar press of the occupation period, the tragic local events of the 1920s and 1930s, a product of Moscow's frontal offensive on what remained of nationally-oriented political elites in the USSR's outlying regions (manifested in Crimea as land disputes pitting two national groups against each other), were cast as an ethno-political conflict. In this account the Jews were not passive participants in a Bolshevik political and economic experiment, but were rather the instigators and guiding hands behind an imperialist policy. The Jews were thus guilty of repressing and oppressing the Crimean Tatar people.

One final remark is in order. Upon examining the newspaper's antisemitic sentiments a question presents itself: did *Azat Kirim* represent Crimean Tatar public opinion about the Jews during the war? Were there any other collective or individual actors in the Tatar community who voiced opposing views? To the best of my current knowledge, there are no other publications or periodicals that could be used to answer this question. No other source are available that might inform us about how Crimean Tatars felt about the Jews – no Crimean Tatar diaries or memoirs of the wartime period have been discovered.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the Tatars were later deported from Crimea, and those few members of the older generation who have been repatriated are not very enthusiastic about recalling the war or providing testimony. Their postwar experience was deeply traumatic, marked by deportation and long-lasting discrimination. Today they are very sensitive concerning anything that might enable anyone to revive the Soviet myth about massive collaboration of Tatars with the Nazis. What is certain is that *Azat Kirim* cannot be taken as a reliable reflection of the Tatars' feelings about the Jews.

55 In comparison with other ethnic groups in the peninsula, the Tatars had a relatively lower level of education. According to the USSR census of 1939, approximately two-thirds of Tatars were rural (unlike the other major groups, Russians, Ukrainians and Jews, most of whom were city and town dwellers). Living in rural areas necessarily meant, at that time, receiving only a basic level of education, if any at all.