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Social sanctions and violent mobilization: lessons from the Crimean Tatar case

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ABSTRACT

How do social sanctions affect individual participation in civil war violence? Which mechanisms facilitate implementation of social sanctions in times of crises? This study draws on unique in-depth interview data with former ethnic Crimean Tatar combatants in Ukraine to flesh out specific mechanisms that enable social sanctions to function as an effective instrument of violent mobilization, facilitating individual participation in high-risk collective action. Empirical findings demonstrate that in the Crimean Tatar case (non)participation in high-risk collective action had an effect on individuals' family honor within the community, and on their access to community-distributed public goods, such as jobs and social benefits. The effect of social sanctions on violent mobilization remains particularly strong among traditionalist societies with higher levels of adherence to social norms, local customs, and traditions. The findings reveal that while social sanctions remained effective among rural community residents, their effect was limited on non-community urban settlers.

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Introduction

Do social sanctions affect participation in civil wars? What are the mechanisms and conditions under which social sanctions work in the context of an armed conflict? A seminal study on causes of violent mobilization in Sierra Leone's civil war by Macartan and Weinstein (2008) was among the first few efforts to emphasize the role of social sanctions as determinants of participation in violent collective action.[1] Notwithstanding a voluminous body of research examining the effect of social sanctions on collective action and conflict prevention and resolution in sociology, anthropology, and psychology, among other disciplines, social sanctions have largely been treated as a mere side effect of mobilization capacity.

Theoretically, this study follows an argument that social sanctions can facilitate and sustain violent collective action in the context of civil wars, particularly among societies preserving traditional forms of social organization. As a *process*- rather than *outcome*-oriented factor of violent mobilization, social sanctions differ from grievances- and opportunities-based explanations of participation in armed violence. Social sanctions provide a sense of moral duty and moral obligation, justifying participation in violence. This study seeks to explain specific mechanisms and processes through which social sanctions work to foster violent mobilization in the context of an armed conflict. It also aims to examine what types of individuals within a community are more (or less) likely to be susceptible to social sanctions, and under what conditions.

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This study follows an inductive approach, drawing its theoretical observations from unique interview data with participants and non-participants of the Eastern Ukraine conflict from among members of the Crimean Tatar communities residing in Ukraine outside the Russian-annexed Crimean Peninsula. In-depth interviews were conducted with Crimean Tatar former members of pro-government military units involved in the Eastern Ukraine conflict. Conflict participants were compared with Crimean Tatar men who chose to avoid participation in conflict violence. Non-participants from among Crimean Tatar communities were also interviewed to provide a broader perspective on attitudes toward participation and non-participation among the Crimean Tatar communities. Empirical findings demonstrate that social sanctions work through two related, but distinct mechanisms. The *first* is the effect of (non)participation in violent collective action on preservation of one's family honor within the community. The *second* mechanism is a possibility of losing access to jobs and other services informally distributed within a community as a result of non-participation in violent collective action. More generally, findings demonstrate that the effect of social sanctions on individual decisions to mobilize was critical for members of Crimean Tatar communities adhering to traditional forms of social organization, particularly from among rural community residents. Another novel empirical observation that emerges from this research work is that in the Crimean Tatar case study, social sanctions were more effective not only among individuals living within traditional (predominantly rural) communities, but also among those individuals who were more prominent and actively engaged in community life. Individual family status and sources of income emerged as other determinants of social sanctions effectiveness. The effect of these mechanisms on individual participation in high-risk mobilization has not previously been systematically explored in existing literature, which enables this study to make an important addition to the current state of knowledge on the effect of social sanctions on violent mobilization.

Social sanctions and participation in violence

The existing literature on social sanctions and high-risk mobilization in armed conflicts stems from two strands of research. First, the effect of social sanctions as an element of community structure has figured prominently in research by Michael Taylor (1988) and Theda Skocpol (1979), who examined high-risk participation in historical rebellions. With the exemption of Humphreys and Weinstein's (2008) study, the focus on the mobilizing strength of social sanctions in present-day insurgencies and counterinsurgencies has remained underexplored. Second, studies on the role of social networks in high-risk mobilization emphasized the significance of community-centered collective incentives (Viterna 2006; Parkinson 2013; Tezcür 2016, 248; Shesterinina 2016; Larson and Lewis 2017; Lewis 2020). However, efforts to theorize the function of social sanctions in violent mobilization are notable by their absence even among studies on interpersonal and quotidian social networks and participation in violence (Parkinson 2013; Tezcür 2016).

The role of social sanctions in facilitating collective action has long been explored in research on social networking (Zech and Gabbay 2016), behavioral psychology (White and Gerstein 1987), studies on organizational behavior (Dowling and Pfeffer 1975), sociology (Rob and Mulder 2013), and business management (Van Erp 2007). Olson (1971, 61) described social sanctions as "social incentives" that are "among the kinds of incentives that may be used to mobilize a latent group." The logic of social sanctions in coercing collective action is in their capacity to "distinguish among individuals: the recalcitrant individual can be ostracized, and the cooperative individual can be invited into the center of the charmed circle" (Olson 1971, 61). In a similar vein, Kaplan and Damphousse (1997, 2) described social sanctions as "reactions by others to the real or imagined behavior of an individual. The sanctions serve as rewards or punishments for the behavior, through either the intention of the others or the perception of the individual."

Scholars agree that social sanctions exist to enforce social norms. In Elster's words (1989, 99–100) "for norms to be *social*, they must be shared by other people and partly sustained by their approval and disapproval." Since social norms are collective, albeit not legally regulated, sets of rules, their

compliance needs to be sanctioned. Elster (1989) argues that social norms are endorsed by "the feelings of embarrassment, anxiety, guilt and shame that a person suffers at the prospect of violating them." Social norms do not always need to be conditioned by sanctions in order to be obeyed and followed. Rather, a mere fear or anticipation of possible sanctions may be sufficient to ensure that individuals respect social norms. Both social norms and social sanctions employed to uphold the norms are perceived as "not outcome-oriented" (Elster 1989, 99), which means that actions taken to avoid sanctions may not pursue any further goal.

In the context of armed conflict, participation in violence can be sanctioned by community leaders seeking to enforce such social norms as selective community interests, honor, customary laws, or local traditions. Thus, participation becomes conditioned by the fear of sanctions rather than by the individuals' own willingness to join high-risk mobilization. A failure to uphold social norms can lead to far-reaching social consequences for offenders, which include, but are not limited to the loss of individual or family honor, one's position within community, access to social or material benefits, and even expulsion from the community. Kalyvas and Adam Kocher (2007, 183) have argued that due to civilian victimization by both sides of a dyad "the costs of nonparticipation and free riding often equal or even exceed those of participation." Communities with well-entrenched social norms employ social sanctions to achieve the same effect as the above-described civilian victimization. As long as the majority of community members are committed to adhering to social norms, individuals have limited opportunities of avoiding collective action without facing consequences that are likely to outweigh participation risks. While the outcome of high-risk mobilization and armed conflict may be of secondary importance for individual combatants, their participation or non-participation can influence not only their own role and status within the community, but also the future status of their family. Under such circumstances, the loss of life as a result of participation in (counter)insurgency becomes of far lesser concern than the loss of family or clan status within a community. Previous studies have emphasized the role of honor and social status as causes of violent mobilization during the Chechen Wars (Souleimanov and Aliyev 2015), Iraqi War (Al-Hashmi 2018), Afghan insurgency (Barfield 2001), and historical conflicts in Albania and Montenegro (Boyle 2010).

The bulk of studies on social sanctions tend to agree that social sanctions are enforced through social control (Janowitz 1975; Liska 1997; Chekroun and Brauer 2002). Rob and Mulder (2013, 72) posit that social sanctions can be even more effective than financial punishments as "social disapproval of cooperation" as well as the "social approval of cooperation … boosts cooperation in social dilemmas." Social control is needed to sanction deviation from or violation of social norms, which means that the higher the risk of participation, the higher the cost of non-participation. Elster (1989) lists "feelings of embarrassment, anxiety, guilt and shame" as consequences of violating social norms. Ostracism, dishonor, and exclusion from communal benefits were offered as examples of social sanctions employed to punish violation of social norms encoded in customary laws among the Afghan Pashtuns, Albanian Ghegs, and North Caucasus highlanders (Boyle 2010; Ahmed 2013).

In order for social sanctions to be effective, they need to be enforced by communities supportive of participation in high-risk mobilization (Hechter 1987). It is the community support for collective action that links the social sanctions to greed and grievances as possible drivers for community leaders to issue mobilization calls. Although community leaders can indeed be motivated by either ethno-political grievances or opportunities for material gain, the rank-and-file community members are likely to be forced to participate through social sanctions because their individual gains or "selective incentives" (Lichbach 1995, 215) from participation may be limited. There is little doubt that individual community members can be expected to profess different levels of ideological commitment to the mobilization cause, or might bear similarly divergent expectations with regards to material gain. The loss of life or a possibility of serious injury as a result of participation could serve as tangible deterrents for many individuals seeking to join violent collective action. Despite the fact that the community members can benefit from a successful collective action on a group level, the chances of success rarely outweigh individual participation risks in the context of armed conflict.

Bearing in mind the enormous risks and high cost of participation in insurgencies and counter-insurgencies, scholars predict that participation benefits should greatly outweigh risks in order to facilitate recruitment (Tullock 1971; Horowitz 1985).

Social sanctions can function as a much-needed mechanism for collective action, encouraging participation even among those community members who may otherwise hesitate to participate in violence. This is not to say that greed and grievances or opportunities-based motivations are absent. Rather, for many communities these alone may not be sufficient to facilitate collective action as effectively as when they are reinforced by social sanctions. Social sanctions do not have to be strictly individual or strictly collective. As argued by Heckathorn (1990), "[T]o the extent that members of a group are interdependent, sanctions directed at any individual have consequences for other group members." This means that non-participation in high-risk mobilization is likely to undermine not only the status and reputation of individual community members, but also of their immediate circle. Non-participation becomes detrimental for both the "free-rider's" family and his or her friends.

When and under what circumstances do social sanctions facilitate high-risk, high-cost mobilization? Taylor (1988) argued that the strength of communities is critical for their ability to rely on social sanctions in order to punish non-participation in high-risk mobilization. In contrast to historical or pre-industrial societies, which have often been explored by scholars seeking to associate high-risk mobilization with social sanctions (Chagnon 1988; Taylor 1988), many post-modern communities have relatively weak social control structures, and social norms are rarely enforced through sanctions. In the absence of strong enforcement mechanisms such as ostracizing, castigating, or revoking one's status, the feelings of "embarrassment, anxiety, guilt and shame" (Elster 1989, 100) may be insufficient to facilitate high-risk collective action. In other words, indignation or rebukes from other community members for non-participation in potentially lethal collective action may easily be brushed off by non-participants unwilling to lose their lives only to avoid the "naming and shaming." The lack of social control tools necessary to sanction high-risk mobilization in post-modern societies can be instrumental in understanding why some conflict-affected communities are more effective at pro-(counter)insurgency mobilization than others.

The distinction between modernized and traditionalist or honorific societies (Nisbett 2018) is fundamental in explaining which communities are more likely to be successful in facilitating social sanctions–based mobilization. Existing studies have shown that ethnically and sectarian homogenous communities, as well as traditionalist social groups, preserving tribal, clannish, or indigenous forms of social association demonstrate stronger social network structures (Dowling and Pfeffer 1975; Parkinson 2013; Tezcür 2016). Along with stronger social networks, many traditionalist societies preserve social norms that are often embedded in customary laws and enforced through social sanctions. Existence of strong social or quotidian networks may facilitate implementation of social sanctions through more robust enforcement and control. Notwithstanding the importance of pre-existing network structures for high-risk mobilization, social sanctions function beyond and above social networks in that they are applied to all community members individually regardless of their membership in a network. In other words, for social sanctions to be effective they need to be recognized by the entire community.

This study does not challenge social networking assumptions (Petersen 2001; Parkinson 2013), selective incentives (Lichbach 1995), opportunity structures (Tilly 1978), or "in-process" motivations (Wood 2008). In contrast to these theories, this article argues that social sanctions provide a sense of moral duty and moral obligation necessary to justify participation in violence, enforced through social norms. In contrast to violent collective action driven by ethno-nationalism, religious-sectarian, or political ideologies, non-participation in collective action facilitated through compliance with social norms is seldom optional. In a community with strong externally-enforced social norms, non-participation in collective violent mobilization becomes a risky endeavor that is likely to imperil individuals' status within the community and to affect welfare and security of non-participants' family and friends. To an extent, high-risk mobilization through social sanctions is comparable to the high cost of free-riding among civilians due to anticipated or experienced civilian victimization by

conflict actors (Kalyvas and Adam Kocher 2007). However, much unlike the mechanisms described by Kalyvas and Adam Kocher (2007, 182), which encourage participation among the "late joiners" rather than "first movers," social sanctions can be expected to influence violent mobilization at all conflict stages.

Case selection

The high-risk mobilization among Ukraine's Crimean Tatars to participate in armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine is selected as a case study for several reasons. Beyond researcher safety and access opportunities, the case study of Crimean Tatars offers a borderline case of an honorific society, which has both embraced a modern life style and retained to varying degrees a strong traditionalist form of social organization. Owing to over a half-century-long forced exile from their Crimean homeland to the steppes of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan (Wilson 2013),[2] the Crimean Tatars maintained strong communal bonds engendered in strict adherence to customary laws and traditions (Uehling 2004, 6). During the decades of exile in Central Asia, Crimean Tatars were settled in close-knit communal groups, which despite their predominantly urban residence, experienced literally no assimilation with the local Uzbek or Kazakh populations (Williams 1997). In the words of Williams (1997), "the strongly secular" Crimean Tatars "whose traditional Islamic way of life was destroyed in the 1920s and 1930s prior to their expulsion (the exile served to further break down their Islamic identity)", vehemently preserved Crimean Tatar traditions and customs, centered on the notion of return to their historical homeland (*Vatan*) on the Crimean Peninsula (Kouts and Muratova 2014, 32). Despite pursuing a traditional (honorific) way of life, the Crimean Tatar communities were described by Williams (2002) as "less religious" and more "Europeanized" than indigenous Central Asian ethnic groups. For example, Muratova (2017) cites post-annexation surveys in Crimea to demonstrate relatively low levels of adherence to Islamic traditions among the Crimean Tatars.[3]

The epic return of over 200,000 Crimean Tatars to the Crimean Peninsula, which was then part of the Ukrainian SSR, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, was facilitated by the effective reliance on communal networks and adherence to social norms. The sociocultural codes of individual and family honor among the Crimean Tatar returnees remained firmly embedded in responsibility to defend the historical homeland and their own communities (Uehling 2001, 395). As Crimean Tatar returnees faced a hostile reception from both the local ethnic Russian population and the authorities, the returnees relied heavily on their traditionalist forms of social organization in their efforts to occupy (*samozakhvat*) their ancestral lands. Adherence to social norms was instrumental for the Crimean Tatar returnees' ability to cope with extreme hardships during the early 1990s, which included the lack of access to healthcare, housing, and social welfare services (Uehling 2017).

The Crimean Tatars fiercely objected the 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia (Portnikov 2021). Thousands of Crimean Tatar activists participated in pro-Kyiv protests in Crimea and during the Maidan revolution in Kyiv, which preceded the annexation (BBC News 2014). In the immediate aftermath of annexation, an estimated 25,000 Crimean Tatars left the Crimean Peninsula for the mainland Ukraine, fearing persecution from Russian authorities or seeking better economic opportunities (Ukrinform 2017).[4] The post-annexation migrants have joined some 60,000 Crimean Tatars who were already settled mostly in the southern regions of Ukraine after their return from Central Asia.

Since the start of armed conflict between the Ukrainian government and pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Donbas region in April 2014, over 1,000 Crimean Tatar volunteers have joined both the Armed Forces of Ukraine (VSU) and pro-Kyiv paramilitary battalions. Around 300 Crimean Tatars have served in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (Hromadske Radio 2016). Several hundred Crimean Tatars volunteered to serve in several Ukrainian pro-government battalions, including the "Volunteer Corps of Ukraine (DUK)," "Donbas," and "Azov" battalions. The Crimean Tatar volunteer battalion "Crimea" formed in November 2014 consisted of 450 combatants (Chervonenko 2014). Two other Crimean Tatar paramilitary battalions – the "Noman Chelebi Chihan" battalion and the "Asker" battalion – also

consisted of several hundred combatants each. The Crimean Tatar brigades took part in most major battles of the Donbas War, including Debaltseve, Ilovaysk, Peski, and the Donetsk airport battle. Along with their involvement in the war effort in Donbas, some 500 Crimean Tatars took part in the economic blockade of Crimea from September to December 2015 (Segodnya.ua 2015).

In summary, the Crimean Tatars' recent experience of violent mobilization in the context of the Eastern Ukraine conflict, and their largely traditional (honorific) community-based social organization, defined by the perseverance of social norms enforced by social sanctions, present the Crimean Tatar post-Maidan mobilization as a compelling case to study the effect of social sanctions on violent activism.

Research design and data

Studying members of armed groups, including military personnel, can be a challenging endeavor due to security concerns, restrictions imposed by governments or the armed groups, and access limitations. Conducting research among Ukraine's Crimean Tatars provided a unique opportunity to overcome many of these challenges, as most Crimean Tatar volunteers who served in pro-government paramilitary battalions have now mostly demobilized after the end of the active combat phase in the Donbas conflict. Notwithstanding the relative ease of access to the Crimean Tatar former combatants, the small sample size and challenges of locating individual informants prevented the use of survey instruments. This study draws its empirical data from face-to-face, in-depth interviews with two groups of informants from among the Crimean Tatar communities in Ukraine outside the Crimean Peninsula.

For the first group of informants, interviews were conducted with Crimean Tatar volunteers who mobilized to join pro-government volunteer battalions and the Armed Forces as combatants during the conflict in the Donbas region. A total of 33 informants were recruited through volunteer recruitment centers (in Kyiv and Odessa), the battalions' press centers, and Crimean Tatar community organizations and interest groups. Service in a volunteer battalion or the Armed Forces for 30 consecutive days, of which, at least half involved participation in military action, were used as selection criteria. The sample consists of 23 former members of pro-government volunteer battalions, which include all three Crimean Tatar battalions along with the (non–Crimean Tatar) "DUK" and "Donbas" battalions. Also, 10 former Crimean Tatar members of the Ukrainian Armed Forces who volunteered between April 2014 and February 2015 to participate in the East Ukraine conflict were interviewed. Bearing in mind the relatively small numbers (around 1,000) of Crimean Tatar volunteers involved in the Eastern Ukraine conflict, the current sample represents a sufficiently wide spectrum of conflict participants' opinions. The sample's representativeness is further enhanced by the fact that all Crimean Tatar combatants were members of the same Crimean Tatar volunteer groups on social networking (Facebook, Telegram, and Instagram) platforms, where they on a daily basis shared information and communicated with one another. Owing to the small size of volunteer battalions (from 150 to 300 fighters), all interviewees confirmed that they were personally familiar with all other members of their battalion, and often also with many Crimean Tatar combatants from other units.

All interviews were conducted either in the Russian or Ukrainian languages. Each interview lasted between 20 minutes and 2 hours. Citing security concerns, many informants insisted that no voice recording devices be used during the interviews. Detailed field notes were taken of the informants' responses. During interviews, informants were asked open-ended questions enabling them to reflect on their decisions to mobilize for pro-government forces. The interviewees were also asked to share their opinions regarding reasons and causes of violent mobilization among both their own community and the broader Crimean Tatar community in Ukraine. The interviews took place in Kyiv, Odessa, Odessa Oblast, and Kherson Oblast. Among 33 informants, 29 were residents of Crimean Tatar communities in urban and semi-urban locales. Another 3 informants were urban residents maintaining occasional contacts with other members of the Crimean Tatar community, but rarely participating in the life of the community. Only 9 informants were permanent residents of the

Russian-controlled Crimean Peninsula who had migrated to Ukraine after the annexation. The remainder of the volunteer sample consisted of full-time residents on the Ukrainian mainland. All participants were males aged between 17 and 60 years old.

The second group of informants consisted of 80 non-participants from among Crimean Tatar communities. A larger sample was selected, as there were more non-participants than participants among the Crimean Tatar communities. This group of informants consisted of Crimean Tatar males aged between 17 and 55 years old. The interviews took place in the same locations where the informants from the combatant sample were recruited (Kyiv, Odessa, and Kherson regions) and followed the same interview technique. The sample consists of 46 residents of Crimean Tatar communities who actively participated in community life and 34 urban residents who maintained occasional contact with other community members; 51 informants were permanent residents of the Ukrainian mainland and 29 had migrated to Ukraine from Crimea in the immediate aftermath of annexation.

Interviews with both groups of informants were conducted between May 2019 and March 2020. All interviewees were assigned pseudonyms and their identifying details were changed.

Social sanctions in the Crimean Tatar case

Since the 1944 exile of the Crimean Tatar nation from the Crimean Peninsula, return to historical homeland persisted as an ultimate goal for the vast majority of exiles in Central Asia. For generations, the notion of return to *homeland* (*Vatan*) became an inextricable part of the Crimean Tatar culture (Wilson 2017), equated to such traditions as veneration of elders and celebrations of traditional holidays, such as *Nawruz* (New Year). As a result of centuries-long persecution (first by the Tsarist government and then by the Soviet authorities), the Crimean Tatar tradition of upholding and safeguarding individual and family honor had also acquired an extra function of protecting the community honor. For the tightly-knit Crimean Tatar extended family groups, community existed as the only space where ethnic customs and traditions could be practiced and preserved. The community honor was often engendered in the community's contribution to homeland. Since most Crimean Tatar communities were formed around large patriarchal families, each extended household was held responsible for upholding the community honor.[5] Failure by a community to contribute to the interests of the Crimean Tatar nation could directly affect the status and standing of individual extended families, weakening the influence of that community vis-à-vis other communities.[6] A failure to act in the interests of community can also directly affect the family status of an individual community member, resulting in the loss of honor for all adult male family members. In the words of an informant: "Being part of the [Crimean Tatar] community means that you have to do what is good for the community, and if you don't, then as a man, you simply lose your honor and your good name."[7]

Individuals dishonoring their community also dishonor their family and dishonor themselves. In practical terms, the loss of family honor implies that all family members lose access to public goods distributed within the community, such as jobs, land, access to welfare and healthcare services,[8] as well as leadership positions within the community or nation. Since upholding community honor can be considered a social norm, its disregard is socially sanctioned by the loss of status. As explained by a Crimean Tatar: "your family name means a lot and you will think twice before doing something that will stain [*zapyatnaet*] your family name, as it affects your children and your ancestors alike."[9] Throughout recent history, community-centered informal safety nets were instrumental in providing Crimean Tatar households with access to resources. Not only during the decades of exile, but also upon their return to Crimea, connections within the community were often the only mechanisms enabling Crimean Tatars to find jobs.[10] One of the informants explained that "most members of our community work with others [Crimean Tatars]. Your ability to earn good money is a reflection of your status and how much respect you and your family have."[11] He added that "if you haven't shown yourself as a respectful [community] member, nobody will want to work with you. Everybody knows

each other here. Your reputation is everything." Along with endogamy (Williams 2015, 123), community honor was sanctioned not only at the community level, but also within extended families. "Excommunication" from family, the loss of family heritage, as well as the loss of ownership share in family property or business are among the most obvious sanctions. Due to the absolute importance of family in the Crimean Tatar society, a failure to adhere to family decisions and choices was unimaginable for many Crimean Tatars.

While there are complex issues of intra-group inequality and status rewards within Crimean Tatar society, the role of social sanctions in upholding community norms is rather straightforward. As long as collective action is perceived as of benefit for the community, participation becomes a matter of individual, family, and community honor. Non-participation is then sanctioned by the loss of honor, which results in the lack of access to community benefits. Whereas participation is likely (but not expected) to be rewarded by increased or preferential access to benefits, non-participation is sanctioned by its reduction (to varying degrees). The notions of individual and family honor and the necessity to participate in high-risk action remain mostly limited to men and boys, and there are no expectations of females to participate in violent mobilization to uphold the community honor.

The mass return of Crimean Tatars from their Central Asian exile to Crimea during the 1980s and 1990s offers one of the recent examples of community-enforced social sanctions.[12] As described by numerous witnesses,[13] large-scale relocation of Crimean Tatar communities from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan to Ukraine was very much a commitment to honor the homeland rather than a practical necessity. Decisions to relocate were taken at both the community and the extended family level. Remarkably, families with higher status within the community became the backbone of returnees, not only due to their financial capacity but also owing to their intentions to preserve the family honor through their allegiance to the homeland. As one informant recalled: "our family was very influential [in the community], and all of our elders interpreted the return as a matter of [family] honor. Other family members were not given any choice but to follow their decisions. You do not disagree with elders."[14] Another informant explained that his family became prominent and rich in Uzbekistan through their high status within the community, which was achieved because of their "loyalty to the community and homeland."[15] He further confirmed that relocation to Crimea was needed to preserve the family honor and it would have been done "at any cost." The Crimean Tatar families who remained in Central Asia were described by an informant[16] as lacking financial means to relocate, which was due to "their [lower] status within the community," or because "they voluntarily chose to isolate themselves from the nation." Since the return to Crimea was associated with the community honor, it was sanctioned by preservation of family honor and status for the participants. The ultimate reward of the return to homeland was an opportunity to take part in nation-building and the struggle for the Crimean Tatar statehood. The above public goods became unattainable for nearly 240,000 Crimean Tatars still living in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Social sanctions and violent mobilization

The 2014 annexation of Crimea presented the Crimean Tatar nation with the next opportunity for high-risk mobilization, but this time in the context of an armed conflict. Although similar to the mass return to Crimea in the 1980s–1990s, the Crimean Tatar leadership refrained from issuing an official call for total mobilization, the *Mejlis* (Parliament) and the top leadership of the nation, including Mustafa Dzhemilev and Refat Chubarov, publicly denounced the annexation and left the peninsula. The mobilization of Crimean Tatar volunteers began during the early stages of the Counter-Terrorism Operation (ATO) in Eastern Ukraine and the rise of volunteer battalions (*dobrobaty*), which provided Crimean Tatar volunteers with opportunities to enlist. In the words of a former volunteer "few of us wanted to serve in the army, so the establishment of the battalions offered us a great opportunity [to participate]."[17] The vast majority of participants confirmed that they joined the pro-government

units along with a group of relatives or friends from the same community, which emphasizes the role of quotidian networks. A similar finding was made by Parkinson (2013) in Lebanon, and by Shesterinina (2016) in Abkhazia.

A former member of a volunteer battalion described the mobilization process as follows: "We would never be able to join alone and without family and the elders' consent. The decisions [to participate] were always made collectively. Personally, I could never go [to war] unless my father approved of it."[18] A member of the Crimean Tatar community in Kherson detailed that as long as "several well-known families in our community send their people [to frontlines], many others were obliged as well. Not out of solidarity, or friendship, but to maintain the [family] status."[19] Another former volunteer added that "as long as the decision was made [to mobilize], most of us had to do it. It was an issue of honor."[20] Other former combatants were convinced that as long as other families in their community joined the military effort, participation was a matter of "honoring the family name." The family and community honor appeared to be embedded in the broad theme of homeland (*Vatan*) honor. As explained by a former participant: "by serving in the ATO, we were not just defending our family honor vis-à-vis other families, but most of all, the honor of our [Crimean] homeland."[21] Yet, he added that "the family honor and homeland honor are essentially the same thing … as every family is expected to defend the homeland and if they don't, they will lose their own honor." Informants stated that non-participation in many Crimean Tatar communities was associated with the loss of family honor, which was best explained by a former combatant "a former friend of mine, who preferred to stay home, was ostracized … we no longer considered him equal."[22]

Few volunteers associated the Russian occupation of Crimea with the loss of homeland honor. As claimed by a former volunteer: "It doesn't matter for me what government is in Crimea, I will still travel and live there."[23] Instead, participation was more often than not associated with immediate family and community honor–associated benefits, which could be acquired through participation in the conflict and were inaccessible to non-participants. In the words of a former participant: "my family was one of the first to move to Crimea in 1987 and we have business partnerships with many other [influential] families, some of which have members in Mejlis or work as [Ukrainian] MPs. If not us, who else would be representing the nation in ATO?"[24] Similar opinions were voiced by other informants, who strongly believed that participation was instrumental towards protecting their business assets and family status. These informants stressed that due to the loss of honor, non-participation was likely to result in negative consequences for their businesses and assets. As detailed by a participant: "Those men in our community settlement who took no part [in the war effort] were viewed as indifferent toward our national interests … or even cowards. Some [of them] had to leave the community, because few people wanted to do business with them."[25] Another participant observed that: "even if no bad will be done to them [non-participants], the psychological effect of being 'different' and of losing honor is enough."[26]

In contrast to ethnic Ukrainians, the effect of ethno-nationalism and patriotism on anti-Russian mobilization during the Donbas war remained largely misunderstood by the Crimean Tatar volunteers. The following opinion of an informant sums up the attitude of many other Crimean Tatar volunteers: "we didn't fight because of patriotism. Remember, the Crimea didn't belong to us even before [annexation]. It was Ukrainian. Ukraine would never grant us independence, or even special autonomy like we had under Lenin."[27] Another informant believed that "we didn't fight because we lost Crimea. We didn't lose it. We all have relatives and friends there. We can live there [when we want]. We fight because it is our duty as [honorable] men."[28] Discussing the risk of participation in war, former volunteers explained that death in combat is "an honorable end for a man" and that families who have lost their members in Donbas are respected at the "national-level." When asked about the benefits of non-participation, one of the ex-combatants remarked that "of course, I can live safely here [in Odessa], but that would mean that my [extended] family will be remembered for their men who sat at home with their wives and were afraid to fight."[29] He added that the immediate consequences of non-participation for his family could be that "I would have lost my status among my business associates. Now people

say that I am a war veteran and they are highly respectful [of me]. My business is thriving." For many participants, non-participation was firstly associated with the loss of family honor, which was expected to result in financial losses directly affecting the family and community.

The loss of family and community honor was particularly relevant for members of prominent households with extensive networks within the broader Crimean Tatar nation. Participation in the Donbas war was widely perceived as a duty and obligation essential for any male members of the community receiving or expecting to receive benefits from the community. In that regard, sanctions for non-participation resulted first of all in the loss of status-related honor, which was widely consequential within the closely-knit traditionalist communities. Hence, the effectiveness of social sanctions in the Crimean Tatar community is first of all based on emphasizing the feeling of shame for avoiding the collective action, which echoes Elster's (1989) description of social sanctions where "[s]hame or anticipation of it is a sufficient internal sanction."

The challenges of participation in violent mobilization against pro-Russian separatists in Donbas were further inflated for the Crimean Tatar volunteers traveling to join pro-Ukrainian forces from the Crimean Peninsula. In contrast to permanent or semi-permanent residents of the Ukrainian mainland, most Crimean-based volunteers were unable to return to their families on the peninsula as they are wanted by the Russian Security Service (FSB) for their membership in foreign armed groups. Nonetheless, the loss of family status appeared to outweigh the opportunity to return to their families in Crimea. As one former resident of Crimea explained: "I was well aware that if I join [ATO], I will never be able to set foot in Crimea again and live in my house, but I also knew that if I didn't [join], my family name will be stained both here [in Ukraine] and on the peninsula."[30] However, it is noteworthy that many Crimean residents – both among conflict participants and non-participants – expressed their lack of interest in returning to Crimea due to the limited employment opportunities and lower living standards on the peninsula. Some expressed opinions that these issues predated annexation, and that annexation provided the would-be migrants with an official reason to relocate.

Despite preliminary expectations that violent mobilization among the Crimean Tatars was triggered by their anti-Russian grievances, the interview data provide limited support for that assumption. In contrast, many volunteers demonstrated limited loyalty to and appreciation of Ukraine. "We didn't join because we hate Russia and love Ukraine, as is often portrayed in the media" – was stated by a former volunteer.[31] He continued: "To be honest since our return [in the 1980s] we suffered more from Ukraine than from Russia. Ukraine denied us citizenship. They [Ukrainian government] refused us healthcare, education. We didn't receive pensions." Another member of a Crimean Tatar battalion based on the Crimean border recalled: "when we started patrolling the border, catching smugglers and Russian saboteurs, they [Ukrainian military] were unhappy and always interfered, making our work harder."[32] More grievances were voiced by another ex-volunteer: "Ukraine doesn't need and doesn't want us. They like portraying us as victims to the world, but they won't give us autonomy, let alone independence."[33] Although the researchers did not purposefully ask questions on anti-Russian or pro-Ukrainian attitudes of the informants, the lack of trust toward Ukrainian authorities is most likely a reflection of the decades-long struggle of the Crimean Tatar returnees to resettle in Crimea (Williams 2015).

The data provide little evidence that the Crimean Tatar volunteers participated in violent mobilization in order to maximize their community benefits or to obtain extra rewards associated with their participation. As encapsulated in the words of Rizvan: "I did not have the slightest clue whether I will return [home] alive and healthy, so I actually shut down my business before I left."[34] He added that: "back in June 2014, there were no [financial] benefits for volunteers. Those benefits were offered later [in 2016–2017] when we all returned home." This was echoed in the words of another participant: "increase of your social status [due to participation] does not mean immediate financial success. You have to work hard on your business. Your [volunteer] status can help, but only if you work hard."[35]

There is little doubt that the Crimean Tatar volunteers acted in the interests of the broader Crimean Tatar nation. However, the mechanism facilitating violent collective action on an individual level was based on neither grievances nor greed or motivation-organizational *outcome*-driven

explanations. Rather the participation in violent mobilization was *process*-centered, driven by social sanctions. Most Crimean Tatar conflict participants were citing honor, status, and responsibility as both fundamental traditional social norms, and as key factors behind their participation in high-risk action. Selective rewards and benefits that became available to many participants of the ATO were both unexpected and minimal as compared to risks of death and serious injury as a result of participation in violent mobilization.

When social sanctions fail

The example of the Crimean Tatar return to Crimea in the late 1980s and early 1990s illustrated that, notwithstanding the weight of social sanctions, a large proportion of Crimean Tatars have chosen to avoid the participation risks and to retain their property and jobs in Central Asia. And, bearing in mind the risks of participation in an armed conflict, the vast majority of Crimean Tatar males opted to avoid mobilizing for war in 2014–2015. In the words of Hamid,[36] "only about 15 men went to ATO in our community … and there are several hundred men in our community." Although non-participants were well aware of social sanctions, many seemed impervious to social norms due to their family status or income sources. Crimean Tatar males from less prominent families appeared to be mostly ignorant of social norms. A young community member from Kherson region explained: "I am not really concerned about my family losing their 'honor' as we were never [politically] active or influential. There is nothing to lose for us."[37] He added that "for some of my friends going to war was a prestige and honor thing, because that is how their families decided." Another informant from a community in Odessa region observed: "[my family] was always humble and small. My parents won't allow me to go to war, because if I die there will be no one to support them."[38] For non-participants from smaller, less influential and less active families, loss of a male family member – considered the prime bread-winners – was more detrimental than the loss of family name and status.

The Crimean Tatar families' sources of income were similarly important in their decisions to disregard social norms. Despite their community residence, many Crimean Tatar men earned incomes independently of the community. A non-participant described: "many of us have small businesses in large cities. We don't own land and we do business with Ukrainians, not Crimean Tatars. My [retail] business in central Odessa, for example, did not get affected by me not serving [in ATO]."[39] A similar story was shared by Jamil,[40] who explained that "those who run big businesses … which depend on the community, they care about reputation. They will lose their status, if they look weak, or afraid to serve [in ATO]."

Some non-participants also emphasized the disconnect between the broader national idea of the Crimean Tatar homeland (*Vatan*) on the Crimean Peninsula and participation in the ATO, which was understood by some as the "elite-promoted" political objective. As encapsulated in the words of a Crimean Tatar resident of Odessa: "I personally don't see any connection between *Vatan* and ATO. Even if Ukraine takes control over Donetsk and Luhansk … what do we, Crimean Tatars gain from it? Really nothing!"[41] The informant nevertheless clearly understood the appeal for the Crimean Tatar volunteers to participate in the Eastern Ukraine conflict, as "you immediately become a 'good' Crimean Tatar … if you do what the leaders want. And, you will be rewarded [*tebya otblagodaryat*] for that."

Many non-participants believed that since the return of Crimean Tatars from Central Asia, social sanctions are slowly but steadily losing their importance. A non-participant in his 50s lamented that "in exile we all lived together … so traditions worked, but now, we are spread out and … customs still matter, but different people interpret them differently."[42] Non-participants among Crimean Tatars living outside communities, particularly in large cities, were even less committed to the principles of honor, status, responsibility, and other traditional social norms. An ethnic Crimean Tatar office employee from Kyiv believed that: "once you leave community [settlements], the old traditions become immediately extinct. I moved with my family to Kyiv 12 years ago, and we contact our relatives in Crimea only on [national] holidays."[43] Many other urban residents from among non-

participants echoed this opinion by emphasizing that their integration into the Ukrainian society occurred in conjunction with the archaization of traditional (honorific) social norms. The gradual decline of honorific norms among the Crimean Tatar society is accompanied by re-interpretation of ethnic identity and its split from the traditional social norms. This form of identity transformation was described by a non-participant from Kyiv: "To be a Crimean Tatar nowadays does not mean that you have to blindly obey everything that the elders are saying. Those days are gone! We need to have own brains [*golovu na plechakh*]."[44]

The erosion of social norms was followed by gradual disappearance of social sanctions employed to enforce these norms. The gradual decline of traditional social norms among Crimean Tatars – particularly among urban residents – is illustrative of how social sanctions cease to function in modernized societies. An empirical observation of this study is that a divide between Crimean Tatars settled in urban centers and in rural communities is instrumental to explaining individual choices to (not)participate in violent collective action. As discussed in this section, family status and sources of income are other determinants affecting the effectiveness of social sanctions in facilitating participation in high-risk collective action. Thus, the principles of individual and family (community) honor, and the benefits associated with it, become slowly, but steadily confined to narrower circles of more prominent and active families settled in traditional rural communities.

Residents of the Crimean Peninsula with links to Hizb ut-Tahrir were eager to admit that their relocation was a direct effect of Russian persecution. Nevertheless, none of the former conflict participants admitted association with the fundamentalist political organization, which makes it hard to draw causal connections between religious-sectarian grievances and violent mobilization of the Crimean Tatar volunteers. Informants with Hizb ut-Tahrir sympathies from among the non-participants group also demonstrated limited adherence to traditional social norms, instead emphasizing the importance of religious values. In the words of a Hizb ut-Tahrir sympathizer from the Crimean Peninsula: "I would join [ATO] if there was real jihad taking place against Russians, but it was all just politics. No place for Muslims there [at the ATO]. No place for Crimean Tatars."[45] It could be hypothesized that membership or association with Hizb ut-Tahrir is another factor potentially undermining the impact of social sanctions on high-risk collective action, but due to the limited sample size (less than 10%) of Hizb ut-Tahrir sympathizers among interview participants, this question will remain open for further study.

Conclusion

This study presented empirical observations demonstrating that social sanctions – employed to reinforce social norms – can function as a robust, yet overlooked (in the existing literature), cause of individual high-risk mobilization to participate in armed conflict. Unlike the greed-and-grievances paradigm, as well as many other explanations of violent mobilization, social sanctions mobilize individuals for high-risk action not to achieve particular end-goals, but to avoid being sanctioned for failing to adhere to popularly accepted social norms. In order for social sanctions to function, social norms need to be supported and endorsed by the majority. As a consequence, avoiding collective action may not feel like a palatable option for some members in societies that can and will enforce popularly accepted social norms. While different forms of collective action require different level of sanctions, more robust forms of social control – such as control over access to public goods – are employed to facilitate participation in armed conflict. Much in contrast to ethno-nationalism and other ideology-driven forms of violent mobilization, individuals engaged in violence to uphold social norms are unlikely to shift their beliefs and convictions. One particular caveat that is likely to influence the strength of social sanctions or of their enforcement mechanisms is the society's adherence to social norms. This study posited that the social sanctions' capacity to facilitate high-risk collective action is becoming limited to present-day honorific societies, as in most post-modern societies social norms are no longer socially sanctioned.

The case of the Crimean Tatars' violent mobilization in Ukraine demonstrated the "nuts and bolts" of socially sanctioned mobilization. The fundamental social norms, such as family and community honor, are socially sanctioned in Crimean Tatar society, and their enforcement requires participation in high-risk collective action. Individuals' failure to take part in collective action is likely to deprive them of their honor-related status and social standing. Bearing in mind that the loss of honor-associated public community-distributed goods has serious consequences for the entire extended family, and often the community, the individual risk of injury or death in combat becomes secondary in importance. This most recent episode of high-risk mobilization followed a similar scenario. In pursuit of honor and social status, over a thousand Crimean Tatar volunteers embarked on a perilous and risky violent mobilization to participate in the armed conflict.

Notwithstanding the importance of traditions in the Crimean Tatar society, this study has found that social sanctions employed to safeguard social norms are steadily losing much of their weight, as Crimean Tatar communities are rapidly transforming from an honorific into a modernized society. While many urban residents settled outside traditional Crimean Tatar communities were less susceptible to social sanctions due to their limited embeddedness in community life, numerous community residents also chose to avoid high-risk collective action. The lack of dependence on the community for jobs and other resources, as well as lower family status and their lack of public engagement emerged as critical inhibitors of individual participation in violent mobilization during the 2014–2015 Eastern Ukraine conflict. The case study of Crimean Tatar mobilization is easily generalizable, as many other present-day honorific societies experience similar forms of transition and degradation of honorific social norms. This study has shown that the enforcement of social sanctions can facilitate effective collective action, which few, if any, members of a community can evade without facing the consequences as long as the incentives to participate outweigh the risks.

Notes

1. For the purposes of this study, the terms violent mobilization, violent collective action, high-risk activism, and high-risk mobilization are used interchangeably, referring to high-cost, high-risk involvement in political violence, similarly to how these terms were used by Gurr (1970).
2. In May 1944, the Soviet authorities forcibly exiled the entire Crimean Tatar nation, numbering over 250,000 people, relocating them to Central Asia for alleged collaboration with Nazi Germany during World War II.
3. Public polls conducted before 2014 report even lower percentages (see Muratova 2009, 52).
4. Other sources report that from 50,000 to 100,000 Crimean Tatars have left the Crimean Peninsula since its annexation (see Dorosh 2017).
5. Seimur (age 39), Kyiv, 24 May 2019 (interview).
6. Historical divisions into sub-ethnic groups (*Yali boylu, Tats*, and *Nogays*) continue to persevere among the Crimean Tatar communities. However, as mentioned by several informants, since their return to Crimea these regional identities have largely merged into a generic Crimean Tatar identity.
7. Refat (42), Kherson, 15 July 2019 (interview).
8. Since most communities own their lands, distribution of land remains a prerogative of community councils and other local Crimean Tatar self-governance structures. Following *Samozakhvat*, all welfare provision in most Crimean Tatar communities – including electricity, water, and sewage – were managed exclusively by the communities, and many lacked access to these basic public goods for decades. Many rural Crimean Tatar communities, both on the Crimean Peninsula and in other parts of Ukraine, still lack access to healthcare services. In the author's own experience, healthcare emergencies in communities are frequently addressed by local medical doctors whose fees depend on personal connections with the patient's family.
9. Muslim (36), Kyiv, 25 September 2019 (interview).
10. Makhmud (34), Odessa, 12 July 2019 (interview).
11. Suleiman (22), Kyiv, 17 October 2019.
12. The *Vatan* movement and return of the Crimean Tatars from Central Asia are discussed here as an example of high-risk mobilization facilitated by social sanctions. This study does not argue that comparisons can be drawn between the *Vatan* movement and mobilization to participate in the Eastern Ukraine conflict. It is noteworthy that the case of violent mobilization to participate in an armed conflict fundamentally differs from the mass return to Crimea due to the incomparable level of risk involved.
13. Members of the Crimean Tatar community in Kherson and Odessa, June–October 2019.

14. Orkhan (27), Kyiv, 12 June 2019 (interview).
15. Mamed (34), Kherson, 22 September 2019 (interview).
16. Seimur (39), Kyiv, 24 May 2019 (interview).
17. Gezim (25), Odessa, 14 July 2019 (interview).
18. Khamid (23), Kyiv, 28 September 2019 (interview).
19. Dzhavanshir (21), Kherson, 23 September 2019 (interview).
20. Muslim (36), Kyiv, 25 September 2019 (interview).
21. Rizvan (25), Kherson, 12 September 2019 (interview).
22. Isa (30), Kyiv, 25 May 2019 (interview).
23. Javid (23), Kyiv, 28 September 2019 (interview). Only Crimean Tatar volunteers residing outside Crimea expressed their confidence in traveling to the Russian-controlled Crimean Peninsula, whereas Crimean residents (individuals with a Crimean residency permit, or *propiska*) were concerned that Russian authorities would seek to arrest them for participation in an armed conflict abroad (in Ukraine).
24. Samir (28), Kherson, 18 July 2019 (interview).
25. Suleiman (22), Kyiv, 17 October 2019 (interview).
26. Khamid (23), Kyiv, 28 September 2019 (interview).
27. Isa (30), Kyiv, 25 May 2019 (interview).
28. Dzhavanshir (21), Kherson, 23 September 2019 (interview).
29. Akhmad (26), Odessa, 28 October 2019 (interview).
30. Masud (31), Kyiv, 17 September 2019 (interview).
31. Suleiman (22), Kyiv, 17 October 2019 (interview).
32. Alim (20), Kyiv, 16 May 2019 (interview).
33. Ibragim (36), Odessa, 14 July 2019 (interview).
34. Rizvan (25), Kherson, 12 September 2019 (interview).
35. Isa (30), Kyiv, 25 May 2019 (interview).
36. Hamid (27), Kherson, 19 September 2019 (interview).
37. Arsen (20), Kherson, 27 September 2019 (interview).
38. Orkhan (29), Odessa, 15 July 2019 (interview).
39. Makhmud (34), Odessa, 12 July 2019 (interview).
40. Jamil (28), Kyiv, 24 May 2019 (interview).
41. Asker (27), Odessa, 20 July 2019 (interview).
42. Rovshan (54), Kyiv, 22 May 2019 (interview).
43. Rustem (36), Kyiv, 1 June 2019 (interview).
44. Samid (28), Kyiv, 3 June 2019 (interview).
45. Mahomad (26), Kyiv, 22 October 2019 (interview).

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