Oppressed Oppressors: The Kuban Cossack Revival in Post-Soviet Russia

by

Maxwell Reed Votey
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Introduction

“Men resemble their times more than they do their fathers.”

- Arab proverb

Narratives define national identity, and in the Soviet Union, the state apparatus tightly controlled national narratives. In his article “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” historian Yuri Slezkine demonstrates the rigidity of the Soviet system through the analogy of the "communal apartment", a single apartment shared with multiple families, typical in cities during the Stalin era. Each separate room represents an ethnically-defined republic or autonomous region, whose identities, space, and boundaries were rigidly controlled by the Soviet state. In this metaphor, Russian has no “room” but occupies the communal space in which all the other ethnic “rooms” converge.¹ Yet even as Russia was not defined as a nation (unlike the rest of the Soviet republics, for example, the RSFSR did not have its own Communist Party) it was the territorial center that held the Union and controlled its resources. In the mid-1980s, when Gorbachev's policy of glasnost, or openness, liberalized the public sphere, it gave an outlet to the many voices of Soviet society. Each national “room,” as Slezkine would put it, began to assert its own narrative, but for the first time these

ethnic groups were able to define themselves in their own terms. Russia too began to assert an ethnic narrative, distinct from the Soviet narrative with which it had so seamlessly bound in the previous seventy years.

By the late 1980s, one of the loudest voices was that of the Cossacks. A group that was stripped of its status and power after the 1917 Revolution, whose identity was radically transformed during the Soviet era, the Cossacks began reorganizing and reconstructing their history and identity. Yet unlike the Lithuanians, Ukrainians, or Volga Tatars, the Cossacks had neither a national “room” in the Soviet system nor a pre-Soviet ethnic identity to rally around. In the Imperial estate system that had ceased to exist with the fall of the autocratic state, the Cossacks were considered a social stratum not an ethnicity. Indeed, the Cossacks were not even as fortunate as the Russians, who, while denied their national room by the Soviets, were the “communal space” and constituted the bulk of the land and population of the USSR. With neither space nor population, the Cossacks had to reinvent themselves in order to find a place in post-Soviet society. They did this by combining their historic imperial legacy with the ideologically inflected ethnology of the Soviet-era dissident ethnographer Lev Gumilev to become an "ethnos"-- a concept formulated by Gumilev in the 1960s to describe ethnic groups as units uniquely constituted by their natural environment.

After the Soviet collapse, the Cossack hosts became paramilitary power figures in Southern Russia, reestablishing their place in the new Russia through their newly created identity. As different Cossack hosts across Russia began to assert themselves as power players in regional politics, the Cossacks, and later academics in Russia and the West, termed the Cossack reinvention and rise in prominence as the
“Cossack Revival.” The Russian public received this Cossack Revival as either the second coming of the mythic Cossacks—who rode in defense of traditional Russian values, such as autocracy and Orthodoxy, and would now ride again for a Russian nation—or as a group of pragmatic power seekers, manipulating an artificial new identity to gather power and wealth for themselves.

The Kuban Cossacks, living in the Black Sea border region of Krasnodar Krai, were one of the Cossack hosts undergoing a “revival” in the 1980s, and became an important political force in the region in the post-Soviet period. This thesis examines their Revival from the late 1980s through the present by examining their construction of new or revised historical narratives. The shared experience of the Soviet period was combined with the historical legacy of the Imperial period to produce a new Kuban Cossack identity that guided the actions of the Kuban Cossack's most prominent organization: the Kuban Cossack Army.

The Kuban Cossack Revival was part of the broader Cossack Revival taking place across Russia. Though limited to its home region of Krasnodar Krai, it encapsulates many of the problems faced by a society that lost the Soviet identity that had symbolically unified the country's multiple ethnicities for eighty years. For those seeking symbols and unique cultural forms to redefine themselves in the wake of the Soviet collapse, the Cossacks represented an idealized masculine warrior and a bastion of Orthodox values. For this reason, the Cossack Revival appeals to and extends beyond self-identified Cossacks to a larger Russian population.

The Cossacks exploited their image to develop local political support for Cossack involvement in all areas of regional governance, from education to public
safety. Though Cossack groups hold little national influence, hosts like the Don or Kuban Cossacks have disproportionate regional governmental support given the number of self-identified Cossacks. The Revival also encouraged military adventure and Cossacks engaged in armed conflicts from Transnistria to Abkhazia in the 1990s in defense of perceived Russian interests. This practice continues to the present day, as Kuban Cossacks involve themselves in paramilitary activities in the Crimea.

The Kuban Cossacks illuminate the larger Cossack Revival in several important ways. Academics, rather than military officials or politicians, led the Kuban Cossack Revival and control the movement's main organization. The identity formation focused on comparatively more recent history than other hosts--whereas other hosts, such as the Don Cossacks, date to the seventeenth century or earlier, the Kuban Cossacks as a host that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. Moreover, the Kuban Cossacks, distant from Moscow but bordering Abkhazia, the Caucasus, and the Crimea, were located along a strategically important international border with Georgia, and were responsible for paramilitary activities in conflicts in the near abroad (such as Abkhazia), nonofficial diplomacy, and expelling non-Russian migrants out of the region under the guise of paramilitary policing (as was the case with the Meskhetian Turks). Finally, unlike other hosts, the Kuban Cossacks had a major Cossack cultural organization during the Soviet era: the Kuban Cossack Choir. These distinctive factors give the Kuban Cossack Revival an extra level of complexity that makes specific investigation of the Kuban Cossacks fruitful compared to the more general studies of Cossack revival movements.
The thesis raises questions about the nature of the Kuban Cossack Revival and identity, assesses the differences and similarities of modern Cossacks with their predecessors, and examines how the broader Cossack Revival, a relatively small movement, found such power and prominence in the post-Soviet era. This thesis primarily explores how historical narratives shape identities, how historical narratives and identities interact, and how each can alter the other. Identity is not a fixed state. Many of those who reestablished their Cossack identity may have switched from being a Soviet citizen to a Kuban Cossack Revivalist in the span of a couple years. The existence of a pre-Soviet and post-Soviet Kuban Cossack identity allows us to ask how and why an identity can change over the course of eighty years. What sorts of reference points are useful to a historical identity reestablished in the contemporary period? How does an identity that was formerly a majority of the population in its region negotiate its minority status? What does it mean for the Kuban Cossacks to see themselves as an "ethnos" rather than a social caste? How do the Kuban Cossacks fit in the regional framework of the Krasnodar Krai? This thesis will demonstrate how the Kuban Cossacks' performance of their identity impacted events on the ground, producing political and social developments in the region.

Survey of the Field and Sources

The Kuban Cossack revival occurred across a broad spectrum of post-Soviet life. Therefore, the variety of sources used in this thesis are similarly broad, encompassing written sources from the late nineteenth century and the 1990s,
interviews, archival video footage, and analysis of the monuments in Krasnodar.

While in Krasnodar in late June, early July of 2013, I had access to the archives of the Kuban Cossack Choir, which, while private and small, contained extensive primary sources relating to the Kuban Cossacks and their Revival. I will engage in critical analysis of histories and ethnographies, both those published during the Revival and the late nineteenth century ethnographic studies that were republished in the early 1990s. Both of these sources show how the Kuban Cossacks fashioned their history in the 1990s. Newspapers from the late 1980s and 1990s are another textual source for my work. I use primarily regional, local and Cossack press and gazettes from the archive of the Kuban Cossack Choir, along with larger national papers (e.g. Izvestia, Nezavisimaya Gazeta).

I was also privileged during my time in Krasnodar to interview several members of the leadership who formed and led the Kuban Cossack Army. My conversations with Vladimir Gromov, who served as the first Ataman of the Kuban Cossack Army and was a prominent figure in the Revival, were especially useful for the thesis. I also watched archival videos of the first Kuban Cossack Rada in 1993, a seminal event in the organizational structure of the Revival. Finally, I examine how the Revival altered the physical landscape of the city of Krasnodar by analyzing the destruction, reconstruction, and creation of different monuments and symbolic buildings in the city.

In order to provide context for the English language academic literature on the Kuban Cossack revival, it is necessary to review not just the literature of the Cossack revivals, but scholarship on post-Soviet Russian memory and identity studies as a
whole. The Kuban Cossack structuring of its identity and history provides a complex set of challenges in regards to managing and preserving the “collective memory” of both the Cossack community and non-Cossack population of the Krasnodar Krai. Maintaining the “collective memory” also includes recreating and reenacting each community's history. In *Mythmaking in the New Russia: Politics & Memory During the Yeltsin Era*, Kathleen E. Smith formulates a framework for thinking about “collective memory” in post-Soviet Russia during a time when political elites manipulated historical memory for political gain. However, Smith notes that, “While political actors may promote self-serving interpretations of history, they are neither unconstrained by history nor free of their own bonds of memory.”

2 This framework of political actors mobilizing historical memory holds true in part for the Kuban Cossacks. However, the Soviet state's repression of the Cossacks complicated the Cossack narrative of the Soviet period. Only a small portion of the Kuban Cossack community had the living memory of the pre-Soviet period, and the existence of multiple other collective memories--which were shared, often concurrently, within the community--fragmented the broader historical narrative. While shared collective memories of the pre-Soviet period were passed down through elders, photographs, songs, and linguistic differentiation, a larger collective memory shared across the Soviet Union ran alongside and sometimes intersected with Cossack memory. Along with experienced collective memory, the recreation of history outside of living memory and the reenactment and focus on history formed a core component of the

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Revival. Thus, the management of these different threads of memory was, and continues to be, a central focus of Kuban Cossack political elites.

Shifting from this larger understanding of memory studies, the historiographical background of the modern study of Cossackdom in the English language falls into two camps: the first asks how Cossack revivals' effect modern Russian politics and society, and the second studies the emergence of Cossack ethnic identity. The first group of scholars is more concerned with the proximal effects of the Cossack revival in the post-Soviet environment. They wrote about the Revival as it was happening and examined it through a political rather than historical lens. Articles such as Tomila Lankia’s “The Cossacks: A Guarantor of Peace or a Landmine in Russia’s Federalism,” or Brain J. Boeck’s “The Kuban Cossack Revival (1989-1993): The Beginnings of a Cossack National Movement in the North Caucasus Region,” produce shorter histories of the Cossack revival, framing them in the context of contemporary politics rather than history or identity studies. The second group focuses on the longer history of Cossack ethnicity, examining when and how it originates. Peter Holquist's 1998 article, “From Estate to Ethnos: The Changing Nature of Cossack Identity in the Twentieth Century,” charts the transition of Cossack identity from a legally-defined social group in the Imperial period to an ethnicized identity in the post-Soviet period. As Holquist explains, revival Cossack groups in the post-Soviet period were “intimately tied to contemporary scholarly and  

publicist treatments of the Cossackry.” The modern ethno-cultural model of Cossack history, moreover, developed in the 1960s and 1970s with the works of Iulian Bromlei and Lev Gumilev.

Another perspective on the origins of the Cossack ethnic identity was put forward in 2012 by Ja-Jeong Koo in “Universalizing Cossack Particularism: ‘The Cossack Revolution’ in Early Twentieth Century Kuban.” Koo locates the “ethno-centric self-fashioning of Kuban’ Cossackdom” during the Cossacks’ brief semi-independence in the Russian Revolution and Civil War (from 1918 to 1919). While Holquist argues that Cossack ethnic identity spawns from the late Soviet period, Koo sees the revolutionary period as the foundation. He does not comment on the post-Soviet Cossack revival and what changes may have come out of the seventy years since the Civil War-era “ethno-centric self-fashioning.” Finally, another strand in scholarship focuses on Cossack identity politics. In an article titled “Cossack Identity in the New Russia: Kuban Cossack Revival and Local Politics,” Hege Toje examines the political structures and the local responses of the Kuban Cossack revival in the 1990s and 2000s. Toje asks the “how” and “what” of the Kuban revival of ethnic identity, as opposed to the “why” of their identity formation, which formed the primary focus of Koo and Holquist.

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"Ethnos" as Concept

The Kuban Cossacks imagine themselves as a Gumilevian “ethnos,” but how does an "ethnos" differ from a nation or an ethnicity? In National Identities, Anthony D. Smith provides a valuable definition of what constitutes a nation, which I utilize in my understanding of the Kuban Cossacks: “Whereas in the case of ethnicities the link with a territory may be only historical and symbolic, in the case of the nation it is physical and actual: nations possess territories. In other words nations always require ethnic “elements.” From this perspective, the Kuban Cossacks, despite their land and status in the Imperial period, lacked the ethnic elements necessary to constitute a “nation.” Seen in this light, their attempts to form a shared ethnic identity during the Civil War and Kuban Cossack Rada were interrupted by the victory of the Bolsheviks.

Thus, the modern Kuban Cossack revival cannot revive a “nation” because a Kuban Cossack nation had never existed. Nor can the Kuban Cossacks form one in the present as they lack territorial status and population in Krasnodar. Rather, the Revival represents an attempt to create a lasting ethnicity out of the rich symbolism of Imperial-era history, coupled with memories of the recent Soviet past. This thesis aims to bridge the gap between Holquist and Koo. The fashioning of Kuban Cossack identity draws on both the Soviet-era notions of “ethnos” and their Civil-War era attempt to form a nation. Yet in forming a unified historical narrative, the Kuban Cossacks have also incorporated Imperial narratives. By using both Imperial sources and modern theory the Cossacks both reaffirmed their historical presence in Krasnodar Krai and made their legitimacy not dependent on Tsarist power.

Methods

To conduct my research, I travelled to Krasnodar, Krasnodar Krai, Russia. This was financed by a Davenport Grant. My trip was facilitated by Nina Zonina, a Professor of English Literature at St. Petersburg State University, who put me in contact with the Kuban Cossack Army, and Merine Arutyunyan, a student interpreter from the Kuban State University, who I hired to assist in Russian language interviews. The ability to travel to Krasnodar and conduct research allowed me access to unique material that would not otherwise have been obtainable, such as interviews, archival material, and photographs. Krasnodar, the capital of the Krasnodar Krai, is the center of the major Kuban Cossack organization, the Kuban Cossack Army. I was able to conduct interviews with members of the Kuban Cossack Army, witness ceremonies and events in which the Kuban Cossacks partook and, as previously mentioned, access archives largely unknown to English language scholarship on Cossacks.

In Krasnodar, I conducted a series of interviews with Kuban Cossack leadership. Some of the individuals I spoke with had been involved with the early stages of the Revival, while others are still actively involved in the organization's leadership. I was able to conduct three two-hour interviews with Vladimir Gromov, who was an Assistant Professor of History at Kuban Statue University prior to becoming the Ataman of the Kuban Cossack Army in 1990. By virtue of being the head of the Kuban Cossack Army throughout the 1990s and later a deputy in the regional Duma, Gromov was a source of information about the period that other English language scholars on the Kuban Cossacks have only been able to quote second-hand. Other interviews with figures such as Konstantin Yakovlevich, the
Vice-Ataman on Education in the Kuban Cossack community, offered insight into the organizational and leadership structure of the Kuban Cossack Revival that sometimes corroborated and other times conflicted with written sources.

Working and living in Krasnodar inspired the second chapter in this thesis, which focuses on the Revival's efforts to create a shared regional history through the physical space of the city. My experience navigating the city revealed how rebuilt Imperial-era Cossack monuments altered the urban landscape, and I use photographs taken in the field to illustrate the arguments. The monuments serve as a material source to understand the context in which they were first constructed and the altered context when they were rebuilt.

One limitation of this thesis is its emphasis on Krasnodar, and other research could be undertaken in the future to examine Cossack identity formation and historical memory outside of the centralized Kuban Cossack organizations in Krasnodar. The research I conducted in Krasnodar was primarily through my access to the Kuban Cossack Army and their archives. My claims will therefore be limited to what processes occurred at the organizational or regional level rather than what changes the Kuban Cossack revival had on the identity and historical understanding of individual Kuban Cossacks in the region outside of Krasnodar. From what my research in Krasnodar indicated, there is still much productive research to be done on the Kuban Cossack Revival outside of Krasnodar.

For the sake of brevity, the word “Cossack” is used instead of “Kuban Cossack” and the term “Revival” will be used in place of the full phrase “Kuban Cossack Revival.” When discussing the broader Cossack Revival on the national
level or discussing Cossack hosts other than the Kuban Cossacks, the full terms will be used.

**Thesis**

My thesis will examine how the Kuban Cossacks, and the Kuban Cossack Army in particular, reshaped their historical identity by producing a new historical narrative. Chapter One is a study of post-Soviet Cossack historiography and how it was shaped in the 1990s by Cossack academics, redefining the historical narrative on the Kuban Cossacks from the predominant Soviet historiography. Chapter Two examines Krasnodar’s monuments and symbols in relationship to the Revival, specifically how the Cossacks reconstructed, preserved, or destroyed certain monuments to shape the city's physical historical narrative. Finally, Chapter Three examines the intersection of role-play and militarism, connecting the reenactment of Cossack activities with identity formation and policy making by the Revival.

The center claim of the thesis is this: The Kuban Cossack Revival is not a return to the Imperial-era Cossacks, nor is it an ahistorical or artificial revival. Rather, the Cossacks engage in a syncretic process of connecting the historical past of the pre-Soviet Kuban Cossacks with the realities of post-Soviet Russian society. Contemporary Kuban Cossack identity is firmly grounded in the legacy of the Imperial past yet understood in the language and ideologies of post-Soviet Russia. It is an identity that is both fixed to the idea of “ethnos” yet can be imparted to the
larger, non-Cossack Russian population through imagined “Cossack” values and the sharing of cultural capital.

This claim is seen throughout each chapter of the thesis. In Chapter One, Imperial-era historians are republished and celebrated by the Revival, yet analyzed and understood through the theories of the late Soviet ethnographer, Lev Gumilev. In Chapter Two, rebuilt Imperial monuments that originally marked the bond between Cossack and Tsar came to serve as a shared historical and cultural identity between contemporary Cossacks and the broader population of the Krasnodar Krai, which allowed a non-Cossack population to access a history not available prior to the fall of the Soviet Union. Finally, in Chapter Three, Kuban Cossack militarism, a cornerstone of the group’s warrior status in Tsarist Russia, is reinterpreted to encourage engagement in post-Soviet armed conflicts, the targeting of non-Russian immigrants, and the formation of paramilitary police units.

These chapters depict how Kuban Cossacks navigate between past and present, a process made even more significant by the Soviet state's eighty-year marginalization of Kuban Cossack identity and expression in the public sphere. Though seen as both the mythologized loyal warriors of the Tsars and as inauthentic power seekers by different segments of the larger post-Soviet society and the world, the Kuban Cossack Revival, as this thesis demonstrates, is a both pragmatic and sincere. It is an attempt to bring past and present together into a working Kuban Cossack identity that can be shared by the broader population and used to mobilize Cossacks into action.
Chapter One

“We are a nation”:

Imperial Histories and the Formation of the Cossack Ethnos

In the ideological vacuum of the post-Soviet period, the Kuban Cossacks had to reestablish—and sometimes create—political and social institutions. But they also had to refashion their identity and reconstruct a coherent historical narrative after the Soviet state’s willful disregard for Cossack history. In the Soviet period, Cossacks experienced many problems because of their closeness to the deposed autocracy. This made them a target for violence, first during the Red Terror (1919) and the Civil War, as “decossackization” made Cossacks targets for murder, imprisonment, or internal exile. After destroying their social and political framework, the state conducted a form of cultural violence, making Cossacks assimilate to the Soviet identity. In official histories, Cossacks were nothing more than the White guard of Tsarist autocracy, never to be relevant again. The state apparatus ensured that no expression of identity could fall outside acceptable bounds by tightly controlling the few forms of expression the Cossacks were allowed—whether folk choirs or, for hosts like Kuban Cossacks, the right to fight in the Great Patriotic War as Cossacks.

In certain ways, the Cossacks resemble other groups targeted by the Soviet state, like the Crimean Tatars and the Chechens, who saw their societies broken up, their people scattered, and their identity as a nation made subservient to Soviet
ideological hegemony. However, unlike those ethnic groups, the Cossacks had no ethnic element to draw from when the Soviet Union collapsed, as they had been a social stratum in the Imperial system, and attempts to form an ethnic identity during the Civil War did not have time to develop before their defeat. While the Chechens and Tatars had an ethnic identity that connected their members in an imagined community, sometimes even strong enough to fight a war against the Russians (in the Chechen case), the Cossacks did not share an ethnic identity, even as they shared a history. The Cossacks drew upon their shared history during the Imperial era to form a new Cossack identity after the Soviet collapse, but still needed to define themselves as something more than a former estate in the Imperial system. The Cossacks turned to contemporary theory to satisfy this need, using the theories of “ethnos” devised by Lev Gumilev, a post-war Soviet ethnographer whose theories were rejected by Soviet academia, to create a contemporary identity for Cossackdom, one that would resonate for both Cossacks and non-Cossacks alike.

**Histories of the Imperial Era**

Late nineteenth century historical and ethnographic literature provided much of the material that was reexamined in the post-Soviet Kuban Cossack Revival. Prior to becoming a unified Cossack host in 1868, the Kuban Cossacks consisted of several different Cossack hosts, the largest subset being the Black Sea Cossacks. These were primarily exiled Zaporozhian Cossacks originally from the Ukraine. Older Cossack
hosts such as the Terek and Don Cossacks already had pre-formed historical narratives from their much older history as unified hosts. The Kuban Cossacks needed a unified narrative, and historians and ethnographers trained in and writing for the Imperial center in St. Petersburg, produced the texts that shaped the self-conception of the Kuban Cossacks for years to come. In an effort to tie together different Cossack groups into a coherent Kuban Cossack history, these narratives used folk history and ethnography to construct a lineage that made a claim for the first Cossack occupation of the Kuban region to be far earlier than the eighteenth century.

The Revival used history written during the Imperial era to construct post-Soviet Cossack identity. Fyodor Andreyevich Shcherbina (1849-1936), a Kuban native trained in the imperial center, was among the most prominent of Cossack historians. In the Revival period, Shcherbina became important as an Imperial historian who had Cossack roots and many of his books were republished as part of the effort to bring back Imperial-era historiography to the early 1990s. The Imperial historical narratives allowed for the Kuban Cossacks to repudiate much of the Soviet-era history, which either ignored or condemned the Cossacks, and substitute it with rich ethnographies from the Imperial period, which were often heavily embellished with romantic images of the Cossacks as servants of the Tsars. Such narratives were often accompanied by forewords from contemporary scholars, such as Vladimir Gromov, the head of the Kuban Cossack Army, who wrote about the importance of Imperial-era literature in constructing Kuban Cossack identity in the Revival period. Articles in the major Krasnodar newspaper discussed the republication of
Shcherbina’s works and lauded him both for his Kuban Cossack roots and his role in shaping Imperial historiography on the Cossacks. Moreover, authors compared Scherbina’s fate—exile and repudiation from Lenin—to the fate suffered by the Kuban Cossacks as a whole in the Soviet period.

Cossacks in regional universities effected and led the Revival, and this chapter analyzes the historical narrative presented by the primary Kuban Cossack organization, the Kuban Cossack Army. It traces its development over time and examines the Imperial and Soviet historiography and ethnography that served as its source.

The Cossacks rejection of Soviet historiography came with an embrace of histories from the Imperial period. These historical and ethnologic studies of the Cossacks served as a source that helped reinvent Cossackdom and fuel the Revival. Such historical texts were not examined by scholars who had appeared in the post-Soviet academic landscape *ab nihilo*, but by Soviet-trained academics whose methodologies were a product of the Soviet era, even if they had rejected Soviet-era interpretations of Cossack history.

**The Kuban Cossack Revival in Academia**

Academics played a disproportionately important role in the Revival. Indeed, the leadership of the Revival movements came not from the stanitsas or the military, but from the universities. Krasnodar State became the center of Kuban Cossack
activity in 1988-1989 as both students and academics took an active interest in studying and reviving the customs and traditions of the Cossacks. The Kuban Cossack Club, the first university club centered on the Revival, stated in its charter that the purpose of the club was to “promote the preservation of historical and cultural monuments, the revival of forgotten traditions, and the study of Kuban Cossack history and culture.” The stated purpose therefore is academic and cultural rather than overtly political, with a claim to act solely for the preservation and revival of history and culture rather than as a body that represents the political will of the Kuban Cossacks. Such claims to being "apolitical" served to present the Kuban Cossacks as non-threatening to the establishment and the larger population. Politics and factionalism, it was thought, “tarnished” the image of the Revival, which would ideally offer its undivided attention to fulfilling its role as the protector of Russia, Christian Orthodoxy, and traditional values.

Indeed, the club's first numbered task distanced itself even further from overtly political aims. It stated that, "The Kuban Cossack Club was formed with the goal of a more complete fulfillment of the interests and spiritual needs of the people, patriotic education for citizens, the promotion of the revival of the Cossack culture and art, the study and return of Cossack traditions, history, and ethnography to the people." This nebulous task combines education, culture, and spirituality, and no political aims are explicitly mentioned. However, in order to accomplish these ostensibly apolitical goals, the Cossacks would have to wield significant political

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9 Vladimir Gromov, conversation with author, 27 June 2013.  
10 Aleksandr G. Burmagin, Ot Kubanskogo Kazachego Kluba K Kubanskoj Kazachej Rade [From the Kuban Cossack Club to the Kuban Cossack Rada] (Krasnodar: 2009), 249.  
11 Ibid., 250.
influence in the region. Such a statement is in many ways representative of the Kuban Cossack mission: The direct aim of the Revival of Kuban Cossack culture and traditions is coupled with a broadly defined spiritual-patriotic mission to lift up the citizens of the Russian Federation. At the same time, these spiritual-patriotic goals are presented as distinct from politics and claim no direct association to any political party or movement.

The academic activities of the Revival focused on correcting the revisionism of Soviet historiography, which cast the Cossacks as irrelevant in a post-Imperial world and condemned them as reactionary and anti-Soviet. As the "Forward" to the book *Where Sleeps the Cossack Glory* states, the Revival serves to restore Cossack history: "In our days appeared public movement [sic], simply public organizations which declared as their goals the revival of Cossackdom. This public movement had positive side as it returned to the society the historically true understanding of Cossackdom which was specifically distorted." The Revival was imagined to create a “historically true” understanding of Cossackdom, and to assume control of the Cossack historical narrative.

The Revival reconstructed Cossackdom to fit into the larger narrative of victimization by the oppressive Soviet state. The Cossack Union, a national organization of Cossack hosts from across the country, published the “Declaration of the Cossacks of Russia,” which makes the victims and the perpetrators quite clear:

After the Great Patriotic War, the Council of the People's Commissioners and VtsIK [All-Russian Central Executive Committee] unlawfully decreed that many of the Cossack regions, such as the lands of the Ural, Siberian, Orenburg, and Semirechye army, the Terek Cossack army, The Don army,

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Caucasian line, Kuban, and Upper Kuban regions, were to be torn from Russia and placed under the control of other countries and autonomous regions.\textsuperscript{13} The document refers to the violent Soviet policy of "decossackization" as "genocide."

However, the condemnation of the Soviet past is selective: it condemns the state's repressive actions, but is not a wholesale rejection of the collective memory of the Soviet experience. In the same breath as it condemns Soviet actions, the Declaration offers "to serve the fatherland, like [they] did during the Great Patriotic War,"\textsuperscript{14} connecting the Cossacks with the most powerful collective experience of the Soviet period: The Great Patriotic War. In fact, the Cossack involvement in the Soviet Union’s defense forms a core component of Revival historiography. This appropriation of collective Soviet memory for Cossack use is representative of the Kuban Cossack Revival in general.

The Cossack identity forged through the Revival carried great weight in nearby regions. Though its ethnic component belongs to an individual by birth, the larger "brand" of Kuban Cossack identity has been defined as something that can be exported beyond of the Cossack community to any ethnic Slav. This is especially true considering that the Ukrainian influences on the Kuban Cossacks from the Zaporozhian Cossacks meant that the Kuban Cossack “brand” extended beyond Russianness. Indeed, the Kuban Cossacks served as unofficial mediators over the division of sea-lanes in the Sea of Azov between Russia and Ukraine in the mid-1990s.

The Revival also gave the Cossacks a monopoly on the teaching of regional history. Conservative Russians share with Cossacks a commitment to Orthodoxy,\textsuperscript{13} Burmagin, \textit{Ot Kubanskogo Kazachego}, 271.\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 272.
militarism, and the protection of the Russian motherland from foreign influence and invasion. The Kuban Cossacks have the advantage of packaging these ideological points into the romantic notion of the Cossack, forged out of nineteenth century literature and ethnography. The Cossacks, led by academics, understood these narratives and how mold them into a compelling tale for a contemporary audience interested in pre-Soviet history and seeking solutions to the perceived moral problems of post-Soviet Russia. These points made their offer to influence the educational system appealing to the regional government. Cossack historical narratives are implemented into the systems of primary and secondary Cossack schools set up across the region to educate children in “traditional” Orthodox and Cossack values (fig. 1.1).

In general, the Kuban Cossack Army has gone to great efforts to promote its image within the school system. These include publishing books of children’s games that promote cooperation and inter-dependency, which were developed out of archival research from pre-Soviet documents. Furthermore, the Kuban Cossacks were asked to assist writing public school textbooks for the mandatory regional history courses, defining the history curriculum taught to all students, Cossack or not.
The Appropriation of Imperial Historiography

Academic scholarship of the perestroika period was critical to the rewriting of Kuban Cossack identity. While Cossack identity was largely seen through the theoretical framework of Lev Gumilev, the historiographical precedents that these historians referenced came not out of the Soviet period, but from histories and ethnographic studies done in the late Imperial period. Just as the Imperial state consolidated the Kuban Cossacks within the Empire, state-promoting narratives depicted Kuban Cossack history as stemming from and dependent on the Imperial autocracy.

Fyodor Andreyevich Shcherbina best encapsulates the Revival’s enthusiasm for Imperial texts. An historian and ethnographer working from the Imperial capital of St. Petersburg, he wrote the first complete history of the Kuban Cossacks, entitled *The History of the Kuban Cossack Host* and published in 1880.¹⁵ Shcherbina was of Cossack decent and born in the Kuban region and lived through the Revolution, seeking exile in Western Europe following the Civil War. He was not published in the Soviet Union again until the start of the Cossack revival, with *History* being republished in 1987. Vladimir Gromov wrote a new introduction. One sign of the new freedom accorded to journalism during glasnost was the fact the republication of a banned book was covered in the Soviet regional newspaper, the *Komsomolets Kubani*. These documents provide insight into how Imperial-era histories were perceived and deployed by the Revival in the post-Soviet context.

¹⁵ Vladimir Gromov, forward to *Istoriya Kubanskago Kazachyago Vojska Tom 1 [History of the Kuban Cossack Army]* by Fyodor A. Shcherbina, (Krasnodar: Sovetskaya Kuban, 1992).
Cossack praise for Shcherbina goes beyond an appreciation of his scholarship. Although the forward notes that he “highlighted the problems in the history of Kuban which are, to this day, relevant, disputable, and need in-depth research,” the primary interest in his work has as much to do with its content as with Shcherbina as a figure, and his credentials as a Cossack matter. A January 1987 article from Komsomolets Kubani demonstrated his Cossack identity before reviewing the history itself: “All Shcherbinas were good Zaporozhians in Pereyaslovskiy kurin. In a book that survived from the old Sich, there is an original signature of his paternal great-grandfather—in the list of signatures of the free Cossacks who were upset and didn’t sail to Turkey in 1775, but became loyal to Russia.” Shcherbina’s pedigree is flaunted, connecting him all the way back to the predecessors of the Kuban Cossacks, the Zaporozhian Cossacks, and more importantly, the part of the Cossack Sich that stayed loyal to the Imperial Russian state.

The piece also celebrates Shcherbina’s educational success in the face of poor literacy rates and education among both Cossack and non-Cossack populations in nineteenth century rural Russia, stating: “You and I are much luckier in education than Shcherbina and our other ancestors were, but sometimes we are much less grateful for it to our thoughtful society. Shcherbina’s hard-working nature and the difficult journey from the Cossack illiteracy to education and to the responsibility to take upon him the excavation of history are truly inspiring.” In the Kuban Cossack Revival, anyone can read the sources and become an expert in Cossack history, and

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16 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
Shcherbina's triumph over the uneducated nature of the typical Cossack is something to admire and imitate.

Scherbina's dedication to Cossack history and the meticulousness of his work is also praised because it connects the reader to Kuban Cossack identity. As Gromov notes in the Forward:

In these books, the reader would find and come to know the beginning of the history of their region, village, family, because they contained the information about events, in which real people took part—villagers, relatives, etc. It is rare that a village that was found on Kuban in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century wasn’t described at least in a couple of words or lines. And this was extremely important. The basis for every Cossack’s consciousness of their involvement in history was being formed. It is no surprise that The History of the Kuban Cossack Host appeared in any educated Cossack family, library, village school, or college. 19

The history serves as the foundation for the Kuban Cossack identity. It unites Cossacks over time and universalizes the Cossack experience to every village and person in the Kuban. The forward suggests that history is the most important part of Cossack identity.

The importance of this Imperial history is also contrasted with the problems of Soviet-era historiography:

Shcherbina found himself much more free than the succeeding Soviet historians of the region. This freedom manifested itself in the fact that the historian did not limit himself to only the history of the Cossacks, but also gave the most extensive description of the history of Kuban from the earliest times on the basis of broad documentary material, which had been selected in such a way as to not make it one-dimensional, and to show history as a complex and contradictory process. 20

The image of the free scholar in opposition to the coercive Soviet state is highlighted again in the Soviet condemnation of Shcherbina’s work: “The image of an emigrant

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19 Gromov, forward to Istoriya Kubanskago.
20 Ibid.
as irreconcilable class enemy who does not deserve compassion, forgiveness, or to be remembered, was forming in the public conscience for a long time. Because of it, Shcherbina’s works on statistics and economics were forgotten, and sometimes even banned.”\textsuperscript{21} These two quotes suggest that Soviet historiography studied the Kuban Cossacks narrowly, treating them primarily as Tsarist instruments of repression and terror. Shcherbina appeals to the Revival not only for his positive stance on Cossackdom but because his work establishes Cossacks as an important part of the region, reaffirming Cossack legitimacy.

Shcherbina’s writings also serve to highlight values that the Revival wished to promote. In particular, the Revival focused on religiosity as a central part of Cossack identity and a necessary tool for regenerating post-Soviet society. Gromov emphasizes this when he writes, “I think that in our time, when we are returning to our spiritual roots, the reader will reflect upon and realize how important of a role faith played in the Cossacks’ lives, whose protectors and guardians they have always been.”\textsuperscript{22} The Orthodox faith plays a crucial role in the Revival, providing the Cossacks with an ally who suffered under the Soviet state, as well as with a framework of traditional values that help define post-Communist identity.

Perpetuating the idea that the Kuban Cossacks are defenders of Orthodoxy is a core component of the Kuban Cossack historical narrative and identity and having an Imperial scholar perpetuate these claims legitimizes them.

Such scholars also become more than elites from the Imperial center, but figures integrated into Kuban Cossacks’ lives. As the January 1987 article heading

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
reads, “F.A. Shcherbina is not just a Corresponding member of St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences and a professor—he is a historian and the chronicler of Kuban.”

Though Shcherbina was a Cossack, his work in St. Petersburg associated him with the Imperial state. This implicitly made him an outsider to the Kuban Cossacks, who saw themselves as autonomous and distinct, even as they defended the autocracy. The Kuban Cossacks reclaim Shcherbina not as a formal “professor” or “corresponding member” but as a down-to-earth chronicler of the Kuban Cossacks, close to his Cossack roots.

A final, key theme from the republishing of Shcherbina’s work is the importance of the fact that History was ignored for the entirety of the Soviet era. As the article notes, “The History of the Kuban Cossack Host was not published for 75 years, and for 75 years the colleagues didn’t write anything about its author.”

Gromov’s forward similarly notes this and goes on to explain why Cossack scholarship was ignored in the Soviet period:

But for now we have to agree that F.A. Shcherbina created a work which to this day has not been matched in fullness, the range of events, comprehensive description of the history of Kuban and the Cossacks—and it is not because of the lack of talented historians. There have always been a few, but the topic of the Cossacks was unwelcome in the Soviet historical literature until recently. The priority was given to the questions of socio-economic development of Kuban. The Cossacks were seen as a support for czarism, the counterrevolutionary power, and therefore its positive role in Russian history was put into question.

Bringing such narratives into the discourse on Cossacks serves to rehabilitate Cossackdom academically, offering a counterpoint to the Soviet literature that either

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23 “Korni Istorika,” Komsomolets Kubani.
24 Ibid.
25 Gromov, forward to Istoriya Kubanskago.
ignored the Cossacks or portrayed them as detrimental to the development of the Russian and later Soviet state.

After the Civil War, Shcherbina was driven into exile and died outside of Russia. Revival historiography cast him as a figure devoted to studying the Kuban Cossacks, who, as a victim of the Soviet regime, shared the fate of the Kuban Cossacks themselves. The process of rehabilitating and launching of Shcherbina’s work into the academic and public world is then also a rehabilitation of academic work on the Cossacks and pre-Soviet historical narratives as valid avenues of study and interpretation. As the forward explicitly notes: “The fate of the historian, the public and political figure, Fyodor Andreyevich Shcherbina, the fate of his scholarly and historical legacy, and the fate of the Kuban Cossacks, from which he came and to whose history he devoted his work, merged into one, quite tragic fate.\(^{26}\)” The historian and by extension, historical interpretation are tied directly to fortunes of the Kuban Cossacks. Shcherbina’s story resonates with the Kuban Cossacks in part because his life was in many ways the story of the Kuban Cossacks themselves. Historical representation then becomes a key issue in the Revival as the fate of the Kuban Cossacks is reflected in the republishing and reinterpreting Cossack historiography.

Late Imperial histories are not just texts that provide a wealth of historical information on Cossack life and history but documents that were condemned and ignored. These works form the basis from which new generations can be taught Cossack history. As songs are sung and costumes are worn to remember the culture of generations of Cossacks past, these histories are republished and their authors are

\(^{26}\) Ibid.
rehabilitated as Cossack heroes and role models for future Cossack academics. Though their writing is dated and exhibits a clear pro-Tsarist bias, they are read because they are a direct linkage between Imperial past and post-Soviet present.

**Lev Gumilev and the Construction of the Cossack Ethnos**

The Kuban Cossack Revival is as much in debt to Lev Gumilev's ethnologic theory as it is to the Imperial historiography. The academics that organized and ultimately led the Revival were trained as Soviet academics. In the late Soviet period, understandings of history and ethnicity came to be dominated by Lev Gumilev and his theory of ethnos and ethnogenesis. Developed in the 1960s, ethnos and ethnogenesis provided an alternative framework for understanding ethnicity and identity. Ethnic groups were defined by natural conditions and geography rather than a shared culture or society. Groups formed from the biosphere, their ethnic identity arising from the natural conditions of their environment. Gumilev's theory was very popular in early post-Soviet period as his banned works were published again, and the Revival’s leadership, primarily composed of academics from Kuban State University, incorporated Gumilev's thought into the Revival narrative. In this way, the Imperial-era historiography is analyzed through the concepts and methods produced in the Soviet era.

Lev Gumilev was a Soviet academic at Leningrad University who, having spent most of his youth in labor camps, wrote his theories of ethnography and
ethnogenesis in the 1960s after working in both the fields of archeology and geography. His works were soon rejected by Soviet academic authorities and banned from publication, only to be republished in the Perestroika period. For Gumilev, “ethnos”—as opposed to ethnic identity, which is cast as a mere human construct—is a natural structure that is distinct and enduring. As he puts it in Ethnogenesis and the Biosphere of Earth: “… ethnoi are a phenomenon at the boundary of the biosphere and the sociosphere, that has a very special function in the structure of the Earth’s biosphere.”

Ethnicity, for Gumilev, is an enduring product of humans interacting with their geographic and environmental conditions, not an imagined or ephemeral product of human society. The larger Ethnosphere that comprises all ethnoi is similar to the natural sphere: “… the term ‘ethnosphere’ which, like other geographical phenomena, must have its own patterns of development. Different from biological and social. Ethnic patterns are observable in space (ethnography) and in time (ethnogensis and the paleogeography of the anthropogenic landscape).” Ethnicities do not rise and fall spontaneously, but have concise patterns of growth, stagnation, and decay that are similar to developments in the natural world. Furthermore, an ethnos is hard to destroy because “an ethnos can be broken up, but it is preserved in a diasporic state, forming numerous relict forms.” The ethnos, in Gumilev’s framework, is something linked to nature and formed by environment rather than by economic, political, or cultural influences.

The rapid revival of the Kuban Cossacks is also conceptualized through Gumilev. In Gumilev’s theory, nations go through sudden periods of growth, and the

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28 Ibid. 51.
29 Ibid., 57.
Kuban Cossacks see themselves in one of the rising periods. The growth of the movement from small club organizations to the formal Kuban Cossack Army is not just credited to the success of the leadership or political factors, but as a natural stage in the development of the Kuban Cossack nation. Furthermore, the existence of the Kuban Cossack Revival demonstrates the virility of the Kuban Cossack ethnos; the expansion of the movement indicates that rather than facing stagnation as befalls ethnos over time, the ethnos is in a new, rapid growth stage. The concept that Cossacks form a unique ethnos is connected to the mythical narrative of the Cossack as a savior of a troubled Russia. The Cossack, as a product of Russian geography and climate, has a privileged and unique role in serving Russia. The Kuban Cossack revival movement, while promoting its own uniqueness and independence as an “ethnos,” sees itself on a larger mission to save Russia, not through military or political power, but as bearers of an “old authentic specificity” that provides the country with a moral compass and allows Cossacks to serve the Russian people in times of need.

Though Kuban Cossack leadership saw the Cossacks as an established “ethnos,” this was not the only interpretation of Kuban Cossack identity. Others rejected the idea that the modern Kuban Cossacks constituted an ethnos. In 1993, I. Averin wrote an article directly addressing the Revival's ethnic claims:

However, in the late 80s starts the new, fourth stage of the history of Cossacks. The Cossacks, like the phoenix, are reborn from the ashes and non-existence. Thus, in the old times there was no “Cossack” ethnos, but it was a term denoting a social category of population which was formed from the representatives of different ethnic groups. Later the Cossack groups were formed only under the control and at the initiative of the government, and not

30 Ibid., 378-379.
31 Ibid., 239-241.
according to the natural ethnos-forming laws. The Cossacks did not become a separate ethnic group—they continue to be the integral and organic part of the ethnic groups from which their ancestors came into the Cossack estate.\textsuperscript{32}

Averin locates Cossack ethnic identity in the larger ethnicities from which their social class derived, namely Russians. Though the Revival is a rebirth of Cossack identity, the Revival could not transform the Cossacks into something they were not prior to the revolution. Interestingly, Averin locates the origins of the Cossacks as an "ethnos" in the Civil War era, writing that, “The rise of such sentiments was previously seen during nation-wide crises, for instance, during the Civil War of 1918-1922. It is in these conditions that various myths were born, and the most significant of them became the view of the Cossacks as an independent ethnos.”\textsuperscript{33} He equates the attempted ethnic identity formation by the Kuban People’s Republic, a briefly independent Kuban Cossack state, with Gumilev's ethnos, even though ethnos was not developed for another sixty years.\textsuperscript{34} So, while denying that the Kuban Cossacks an identity is an ethnos, Averin accepts the theory of ethnos as the way to understand and define ethnicity.

An appreciation of Gumilev’s work was not unique to the Cossack revival, but rather part of a broader acceptance of Gumilev’s theory by movements seeking to revitalize Russia, particularly the neo-Eurasianists. As anthropologist Serguei Oushakine notes in his book, \textit{The Patriotism of Despair}:

Gumilev’s idea of the all-determining significance of the geopolitical juncture provided them with an additional theoretical argument that grounded the source of Russia’s cultural and political uniqueness in its transitory location between West and East…the role of this juncture would be theorized by

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
Russian neo-Eurasianists, who would turn a potential detrimental class of Russian and Asian civilizations into a production collision of ascending and descending ethnoses.³⁵

Whereas the neo-Eurasianists interpreted Gumilev to justify the special character of the Russian ethnicity as distinct from the West, the Kuban Cossacks interpreted Gumilev to establish themselves as a defined ethnos that could not be destroyed by Soviet coercion and whose revival represented a rebirth of the ethnos. The shared deployment of Gumilev's theory serves as common ground between the Cossacks and the neo-Eurasianists, whose interpretations of Russian identity also appealed to elites in the fledgling Russian state.

Crucially, both movements rejected the idea that the West was a component in the formation of Russian identity. The neo-Eurasianists were associated with political organizations like the National Bolshevik Party (NBP) which has a complicated and often antagonistic relationship with the Russian state and Orthodox Church. Anti-capitalistic, nationalistic, and fascist, the NBP promoted a mixture of neo-Nazi fascism with an appreciation for the Bolshevik past. The NBP provided alternative models of national identity and political order to the Russian people, actively trying to engender loyalty through contrast with existing state policy. Inherent in this promotion of a different Russian nationalism was a rejection of the Western influences of Boris Yeltsin’s neoliberal reforms in the early 1990s. The NBP used Gumilev in part as an alternative national narrative with an anti-Western voice to contest neoliberal market reforms, championing Russia’s separateness from the political and economic liberalism of America and Western Europe. Likewise, the

Revival used Gumilev to the reject the West and embrace the Orthodox Church, forging and intrinsic link between the Cossack "ethnos" and the rejection of the West.

The application of Gumilev’s theory demonstrates the academic complexity and political insight of the Revival, which goes beyond adapting traditional beliefs and ideologies. Adopting Gumilev’s literature to explain the particular nature of Cossack ethnos-based identity can be seen as a modernization of Cossack identity. Cossack identity was transformed from an estate identity, as it had been in the Imperial era, into an ethnos easily recognized by contemporaries. This strategy puts the Kuban Cossacks less in line with ethnically-defined groups in Russia like the Tatars, Yakuts, and Chechens, and closer in ideology to the neo-Eurasianists and Russian nationalists. This then explains how the Kuban Cossacks, though proud of their apparently shared history and lineage, can also claim to be the defenders of Russian values. The Gumilev “ethnos” connection between Cossack and the rest of the non-Cossack population served to replace the uniting connection of Orthodox Church and the Tsar to all Russian subjects held in the Imperial era, allowing someone to be both a Kuban Cossack and more broadly a Russian.

Conclusion

Academic publications came to serve as the framework from which the Kuban Cossack Revival engaged the society, culture, and politics of post-Soviet society. Imperial historians such as Shcherbina were voices of a condemned and forgotten
past. The republishing and celebration of Imperial histories provided younger generations of Cossacks with an accessible genealogies and histories that reaffirmed the values and legacy of the Imperial past in the post-Soviet present. The reexamined Imperial work was coupled with the ethnographic theories of Lev Gumilev—produced in the Soviet era, and popularized in the post-Soviet period. Gumilev was used to argue that the Kuban Cossacks are more than a social stratum, but also an ethnos, justifying their existence in a post-Soviet social order without social strata. Gumilev’s discourse gave the Revival an ideological purpose, as the passion and dedication of the Revival in forging Cossack identity was also preventing its stagnation and the destruction of the Kuban Cossack “ethnos.” Gumilev’s theories brought the Cossacks closer to neo-Eurasianists and Russian nationalists, as they all envisioned their Slavic heritage as distinct from both the West and East. Within this framework, the Kuban Cossacks saw themselves as a unique ethnos within the larger Russian/Slavic ethnos and vitally important in keeping both groups healthy by keeping them free from foreign influence.

The academic work on the Kuban Cossacks made the Revival’s leaders academically savvy to current trends in the post-Soviet environment. Though Cossack historians returned to pre-Revolutionary texts, they were not historically myopic and always mindful of the contemporary situation. The Revival successfully adapted widely-popular ethnographic theory into their own narrative, creating a common dialogue with non-Cossacks, and establishing the Kuban Cossack Revival as the rebirth of an ethnos adapted to a new environment rather than a return to the past. The revision of Kuban Cossack historical narratives recreates a desired past, but appeals
to modern discourse and concepts familiar to contemporary Russians. It is hard to imagine the rise of the Kuban Cossacks within the region without this framework because it supports the entire formation of a distinctive Kuban Cossack identity.
Chapter Two

Monuments of the Past and Future:
Material Culture and Space in the Construction of Cossack Identity

Every Sunday at eleven o'clock in the morning, Krasnaya Street is closed to traffic for the “The Hour of Kuban Glory”—a parade of uniformed Kuban Cossacks, some on horseback, through the main avenue in downtown Krasnodar. The route is demarcated with symbolically charged monuments that have been erected since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The parade begins with a standard bearer saluting a reconstructed Imperial monument of Catherine the Great, which the Soviets tore down and rebuilt during the Kuban Cossack Revival, and ends at a post-Soviet monument dedicated to the Kuban Cossack Atamans, guarded by two Cossacks in full historic uniform. This landscape of reconstructed monuments, erected among buildings embellished by Soviet symbols, encapsulates the Kuban Cossacks’ symbolic management of the urban landscape. The monuments pay deference to an Imperial past, but ultimately come to rest in a set of post-Soviet symbols that praise the Imperial “glory-days.”

In the post-Soviet period, Kuban Cossack identity has been reconstructed through many forms: academic literature, social and political organizations, folk arts, and historical reenactment. However, out these, changes in the man-made environment of historic Krasnodar have created the most palpable connection
between the Imperial past and the post-Soviet present. The Revival altered the physical landscape of Krasnodar through the selective destruction of Soviet reminders, the rebuilding of Imperial symbols, as well as the production of wholly new post-Soviet monuments. The monuments, moreover, are not just meant to come to terms with the Soviet past, but also to frame the Kuban Cossacks as a group more distinct and independent than they had been historically. In the post-Soviet period, Kuban Cossacks cast themselves as an ethnos encapsulating the history and culture of the region, and used physical structures to form this new identity.

From a practical standpoint, the Kuban Cossacks transformed the core of Krasnodar from a Soviet city to post-Soviet one, in part by reestablishing the connection to the city's Imperial legacy. Their achievement of this demonstrates the Cossacks’ significant political power both to get the approval and funds to build monuments and to redesign the public space within the center of Krasnodar. Though no longer the dominant demographic force, the Kuban Cossacks’ articulation of their identity, values, and traditions positions them as the bearers of the region’s historical and cultural capital. For regional politicians, they offer material to produce a historical-cultural narrative in the ideological vacuum that formed out of the Soviet collapse. This cooperation between the Kuban Cossacks and the regional government illustrates their mutually beneficial relationship.

However, whereas the central powers of the Russian Federation adapt Imperial symbols (such as the use of the Imperial double-eagle coat of arms), the Kuban Cossacks provide a regional link to the pre-Soviet past for Krasnodar Krai—an identity and narrative that is connected to the Imperial past but not solely
dependent on it. In the Imperial era, Cossack monuments only held historical cultural capital for the Kuban Cossacks, and the symbolic value held no meaning to the non-Cossack population. But in the context of the early post-Soviet Russia, these symbols are shared by the Kuban Cossacks to the broader non-Cossack (Russian) population. The Kuban Cossacks transformed this cultural capital into regional political power sharing it with the broader population while still dictating how it was used. Writing the Revival into the urban landscape provides a means to express that power through the monuments and symbols concentrated in Krasnodar, the region’s capital (fig. 2.1).

**Recreating History Through the Landscape of a City**

The Cossacks’ manipulation of monuments’ re-interpreted history to fashion an idealized past that appealed to residents both within and outside the Cossack community. Unlike the dense and inscrutable academic narratives and identities presented in Chapter One, public monuments present a material connection between history and audience. In order to produce the intended effect, the monument should contain symbols that are readily understood, and the symbolic constructions in Krasnodar presented a simplified form of post-Soviet Cossack identity. This narrative presented the Cossacks as both an historic and a contemporary socio-ethnic group to an audience that neither identified as Cossack nor had any firsthand historical memories of the pre-Soviet Cossack rule of the region.
In *Mythmaking in the New Russia*, Smith argues that, “in fact, monumental ventures often appeal to political actors for their capacity to project images of authority and to perpetuate and interpretation of national identity and to that they both convey concern for national heritage and aspirations for the future.”  

36 In post-Soviet Moscow, the Victory Statue on Poklonnaya Hill, the rebuilt Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, and the 98-meter tall Peter the Great statue formed the core of new symbols for a post-Soviet city whose reimagined identity was intended as a national model.  

37 Whereas the monuments constructed in Moscow were intended to portray the identity, symbols, and history of the entire Russian Federation, Krasnodar monuments served local purposes: to legitimize the Revival as a return to the past, to secure the Cossacks' place in Krasnodar's history, and to demonstrate how the Kuban Cossacks survived the Soviet era to flourish in the post-Soviet period.

The types of monuments constructed during the Revival fall into three categories: (1) monuments originally erected before the Russian Revolution and rebuilt; (2) Soviet monuments incorporated into the Revival’s ideology; and (3) new monuments constructed in the post-Soviet period. The most significant category of monuments are those that existed prior to the 1917 Revolution and are established symbols of Imperial and Cossack power. These three major imperial monuments were destroyed in the Soviet period and rebuilt by the revival, each now representing not only the power of the Imperial state in the region, but a return to the historical identity the Cossacks attributed to the city.

37 Ibid., 109, 114, 128.
The Soviet monuments, some of which were removed in the post-Soviet period, were incorporated into post-Soviet historical narratives. The reminders of the Soviet past are present throughout the city in frescos and emblems on buildings, yet some symbols have been removed by the Kuban Cossack Revival, as they are associated with aspects of the Soviet past that were rejected, particularly relating to Soviet leadership and power. However, while certain Soviet era monuments have been rejected, others—such as monuments dedicated to the Great Patriotic War—have been preserved because they fit the narratives of Cossack strength and importance that the Cossacks promoted to the larger population.

The smallest category consists of new monuments created during the Revival. These monuments contain symbolism that differ from reconstructed Imperial monuments because they indicate that in the post-Soviet world, the Kuban Cossacks are producing a distinct identity that synthesizes both the Imperial legacy and the recent Soviet past, but allows them to stand alone as a socio-cultural group.

**Krasnodar: A Profile**

As intellectual and cultural processes crafted new narratives of Cossack history, physical transformations created a new landscape that served to solidify and glorify their role in the region. The most pronounced of these changes occurred in the central city of the Kuban region, Krasnodar, originally called Yekaterinodar, meaning "Catherine’s gift." The city, the only major urban center in the interior of the Kuban,
was founded in 1794, and became the center for the Zaporozhian Cossacks recently resettled from Ukraine. These Cossacks, along with other smaller hosts, were renamed the Black Sea Host in 1860.

The growth of Yekaterinodar mirrored the rise of the newly-formed Kuban Cossacks. The city served as the major administrative, commercial, and industrial center of the region from which the Ataman of the Kuban Cossacks and the Kuban Rada administered the area. The town prospered in the late Imperial period, first from agricultural output and later, by the early 1900s, oil production. The economic growth of the late Imperial period was reflected in the ornate facades that decorated the city's governmental and private buildings.

The monuments constructed in Yekaterinodar were as young as the city itself, with the first major monument in the downtown area erected in 1888. These late-nineteenth-century monuments, statues, and churches in Krasnodar were rich in Imperial symbols that created a close bond between the Imperial center and the Kuban periphery in the young city. The landscape of Yekaterinodar projected the zenith of Kuban Cossack power and prestige within the Imperial system, even as their martial relevance decreased. The wealth of the countryside poured into the city to embellish the Cossack capital, with little money remaining for the development and maintenance of a modern infrastructure in the smaller villages.

The revolutions of 1917, the collapse of the Russian Empire, and the Civil War (1918-1922) that followed profoundly transformed the city. Yekaterinodar was strategically critical as the capital of the Kuban region and, for a period from mid-1918 to early 1920, it served as the capital for the Kuban People’s Republic—an
independent Kuban Cossack state. Though anti-Bolshevik, the Republic was also antagonistic towards other White forces to the point that the Republic was ultimately broken up and its leaders were exiled or executed by the Whites under General Denikin for sending a separate delegation from the rest of the White government to the 1919 Paris Peace Conference.\textsuperscript{38}

The capture of the city in March of 1920 by the Bolsheviks brought significant demographic and architectural changes to the city. The Kuban Cossack power and close ties to the Imperial autocracy made them targets for Bolshevik reprisals. The Bolshevik seizure of the region sent thousands of Kuban Cossacks into voluntary exile, and thousands more were killed, imprisoned, or relocated as part of “Decossackization” during the Red Terror that followed the establishment of Soviet rule in the region.\textsuperscript{39} The Kuban region then saw another major demographic shift in 1932 and 1933, as a result of the famines produced by collectivization policies and state reacquisition of foodstuffs. Collectivization and famine left tens of thousands dead across the region, making the North Caucasus the second-most affected region after Ukraine.\textsuperscript{40} During World War II, Krasnodar was occupied (from August 1942 to February of 1943) by German forces, but suffered less damage than other cities in the region (like Novorossiysk) because it was taken relatively quickly.\textsuperscript{41}

Compared to the massive transformations Krasnodar underwent in the first half of the twentieth century, the city's postwar development resembled that of many

\textsuperscript{38} Peter Kenez, \textit{Civil War in South Russia, 1919-1920: The Defeat of the Whites} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 118.
\textsuperscript{40} Pavel Frolov, conversation with author, 18 June 2013.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
other Soviet cities. The Khrushchev era brought new apartment complexes that intruded into the city core, which had still preserved many of its pre-Soviet structures and neighborhoods. The biggest shift was demographic: Kубan Cossacks, who made up almost the majority of the population in 1917, became an increasingly smaller part of the population as non-Cossack Russians, Armenians, and other Soviet ethnicities moved to the Kuban in the post-war period. By the end of the Soviet period, Cossacks were a minority in Krasnodar, and the city had a late Imperial historic core with a Soviet periphery. The Kuban Cossack Revival developed and reinterpreted these mixed Imperial and Soviet landscapes, characterizing late nineteenth century Yekaterinodar as “a harmonious architectural and dimensional ensemble, fully corresponding to its high status as the capital of the Kuban Oblast and the Kuban Cossack Host.”

This picture largely ignored the contemporary city’s large non-Cossack population.

Three Imperial Monuments for Three Tsars

Commemoration and memorialization were powerful symbolic tools to represent the presence, as well as the benevolence, of the Imperial autocracy to its loyal Cossack subjects. It is no surprise, then, that Krasnodar's three most prominent monuments constructed during the turn of the twentieth century were all connected to Tsars significant in the city's history: Catherine the Great (reign 1762-1796), the

founding figure of the Kuban Cossacks and the namesake of the city; Alexander III (reign 1881-1894), the ultra-conservative Tsar who was sympathetic to the Cossacks; and Nicholas II (reign 1894-1917), the last Tsar of Russia. Both Alexander III and Nicholas II were actively interested in the Kuban Cossacks and both visited the city during their reigns. In Krasnodar, as in other outlying areas, Imperial symbolism connected the periphery to the power of the center. In *Soil and Soul: The Symbolic World of Russianness*, which examines the power and hidden narratives within Russian and Imperial symbols, Elena Hellberg-Hirn writes:

> The territory, with the centre (the capital) representing the original power that radiates over the entire country, is the main source of imperial symbolism. Even spiritual power is concentrated in the capital, so that the symbolism of Russian Soil and the Russian Soil coincide in the image of Moscow as the centre of Holy Russia. In the symbolic terrain of violence, the Russian nation is represented as ever-glorious and as overcoming all possible resistance. This is where history becomes a continuation of mythology, and performs the same function.  

43 Much like the Kuban Cossack historical narratives in Imperial historiography, the Imperial monuments were constructed in the few decades prior to the 1917 Revolution. They were primarily designed to highlight the dependency of the Kuban Cossacks on the Imperial family for their status and indeed their very existence as an autonomous host.

Yekaterinodar features three prominent imperial monuments: the arch commemorating the visit of Alexander III (built in 1888), the Bicentennial Obelisk (constructed in 1896 on the visit of Nicholas II), and the statue and garden commemorating the relationship between Catherine the Great and the Kuban Cossacks (built in 1912). At the start of the October Revolution, these were the three

most elaborate monuments in the city, each with their own symbols and embedded historical meanings, and each representing the Imperial power that radiates from the empire’s center to express dominion of the Kuban Cossacks. These Imperial constructions were all demolished in the first decade of Soviet rule and rebuilt during the Revival. A detailed examination of each of the monuments, both the original context of their construction and their reconstruction, provides the best insight into how the Revival reconstructed Cossack history and identity in the post-Soviet context.

The reconstruction of Imperial monuments took place relatively late in the development of the Revival. The Bicentennial Obelisk, which held the greatest symbolic importance to the Kuban Cossacks, was only rebuilt in 1999, and the statue of Catherine and the triumphal arch of Alexander III were restored in 2007 and 2008 respectively.\textsuperscript{44} Though the Kuban Cossacks had political will to rebuild these monuments, the Kuban Cossack Army was dependent on funding from the local and regional government for reconstruction and financing proved to be a challenge (the Triumphal Arch cost over twelve million rubles).\textsuperscript{45} The funding of monuments was tied to the larger economic fortunes of both the region and the entire nation, and by the mid-2000s, this were plentiful enough to spend on such symbolic projects. The selection and rebuilding of Imperial monuments represented an affirmation of the historical existence of the Kuban Cossacks in Krasnodar since the late seventeenth century, obscuring the fact that their identity was also not the product of recent events.

The center of the city is dotted with monuments, both old and new, which served as focal points in the public spaces of Yekaterinodar. The last of these built in

\textsuperscript{44} Bondar, \textit{Portret Starogo Goroda}, 43.

the Imperial period was a statue of the city’s namesake, Catherine II, in a garden plaza outside the residence of the Ataman of the Kuban Cossack Army. The statue was completed in May 1907, but was originally financed by the Kuban Cossack Host in 1896, the same year at the construction of the centennial monument at a cost of 150,000 rubles. The monument depicts the Ataman of the Black Sea Cossacks below a bronze Catherine, and Prince Potemkin, who carried out Catherine’s order to relocate the Zaporozhian Cossacks to the Kuban. The most notable aspect of the monument is the scroll running down its center with the text of the *Charter on Granting of the Kuban Lands to the Black Sea Cossacks*, Catherine’s mandate to the Black Sea Cossacks for the Kuban (fig. 2.2). Much like the Bicentennial Obelisk that establishes Kuban Cossack legitimacy through an imagined genealogy that extends back a century before the Kuban Cossacks cohered in the region, Imperial documents and mandates make claims to territorial legitimacy in this statue. This establishes the Kuban Cossacks’ predecessors, the Black Sea Cossacks, as the masters of the Kuban despite the existence of indigenous Circassians.

**Triumphal Arch**

The earliest of the major Tsarist monuments constructed in the city—the Triumphal Arch or Tsar’s Gate, constructed between the city’s railway station and the city center—coincided with the 1888 visit of Tsar Alexander III to the city. The red stone arch, built in a Muscovite style, was an entrance to the city by rail, with both

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48 Ibid., 43.
Imperial icons and representations of St. Alexander Nevsky and St. Catherine, the city’s namesake, engraved above the arch (fig. 2.3).\textsuperscript{49} Alexander III’s 1888 trip to Krasnodar was the first Tsarist visit since the end of the Caucasian War (1817-1864), almost a century after the founding of YeĂkaterinodar, when the first Zaporozhian Cossacks resettled in the Kuban region, and eighteen years after the Kuban Cossack host formed. Rather than an inconsequential trip, Alexander III's visit alluded to the blossoming relationship between the Kuban Cossacks and the Imperial family. The Kuban Cossack host may have materialized under the reign of Alexander II, but it took his deeply conservative son Alexander III to highlight the value the Kuban Cossacks not just militarily, but as the symbolic guardians of Russian Orthodoxy and conservative values. Alexander III and later his son Nicholas II took care to maintain a closer relationship to the Kuban Cossacks than their predecessors had, in part because the Kuban Cossacks grew to be the second largest Cossack host, after the Don Cossacks, and were situated in a highly productive region.

Although Alexander II had visited Yekaterinodar in September of 1861 when he came to the city for negotiations with the Circassians, Alexander III’s visit to the city during a time of peace in 1888 had larger implications for the Kuban Cossack narrative. This trip was a symbolic gesture that served to highlight the importance of the Kuban Cossacks to the autocracy. The visits of father and son had different implications for the region, and it was Alexander III rather than his father who symbolized the connection between the Tsar and the Kuban Cossacks. Therefore, it made good sense for the Kuban Cossacks to capitalize upon this goodwill and contract a monument to provide a structure and permanence to a single symbolic visit.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
**Bicentennial Obelisk**

The obelisk honoring the bicentenary of the Kuban Cossack Army, which was (and is now again) at the center of Krasnodar, is the most conspicuous and prominent of the Imperial symbols in the city. The obelisk now stands in a busy traffic intersection, surrounded on all sides by new post-Soviet constructions. It stands around 12 meters tall, with bronze inscriptions on all four sides attributed to Tsar Nicholas II and the Kuban Cossacks, and is topped with a golden double-headed Imperial eagle (fig. 2.4). The monument was critical to cement the new historical narrative of the Kuban Cossacks, and its construction in 1897 signified a high-water mark of Cossack status before the turbulent first decades of the twentieth century.

The obelisk’s construction coincides with the reign of Nicholas II (1894-1917). Nicholas II made efforts to symbolically connect himself with the Cossacks, including the Kuban Cossacks, even more than his father Alexander III. In the face of war with Japan, the Revolution of 1905, and the outbreak of First World War, the autocracy continued to turn to the Cossacks for both military manpower and internal suppression of dissent, despite the Cossacks decreasing effectiveness on the modern battlefield and their willingness to employ the bloody repression of protest that alienated the population from the state. In the uncertain times of the early twentieth century, the reactionary ideology of the Cossacks appealed to Nicholas II's old guard. At the same time, the Cossack’s military purpose became increasingly irrelevant and the economic and the Cossack hosts’ deep-rooted social structures were in jeopardy.

Nicholas II went to such great lengths to personally connect himself to the Cossacks such that his Cossack guards, Kuban Cossacks included, were some of the
last defenders of the autocracy in St. Petersburg in 1917. Nicholas II was the first Tsar to visit all of the Cossack hosts and Tsar and his son the Tsarevich Alexei Nikolaevich appeared and were photographed in Kuban Cossack garb during their visit, highlighting the closeness of the Tsar to his “most loyal subjects.”

Such a donning of a Cossack uniform was important in context of the broader symbolism of uniforms. As Hellberg-Hirn states, “Throughout the nineteenth century, Russian emperors would fuss over the details of their uniform and redesign them to fit their tastes and the fashion of each era. This passion, so troubling to sympathetic critics of the monarchy, ensured that the emperor’s uniform would continue to define prowess, power, and beauty for the Westernized elite.” The Tsar's use of the Kuban Cossack uniform, moreover, presented a stark contrast to the Westernized costume generally worn, and thus underscored the traditionalist spirit encapsulated by and romanticized in the Cossacks.

The completion of the Bicentenary Obelisk, although paid for and built by the Kuban Cossacks, intentionally coincided with Nicholas II's visit to Yekaterinodar. Moreover, the year 1897—when the monument was constructed—makes the obelisk relevant because it signifies a longer relationship between the Cossacks and Nicholas, one that predates that the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) and the Revolution of 1905, when the mobilization of Cossacks for a costly war and internal suppression was critical. Nicholas II's visit to the Kuban Cossacks can be interpreted as a strategy to strengthen the relationship between Imperial powers and Cossack subjects as the

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50 McNeal, Tsar and Cossack, 2.
51 Hirn, Soil and Soul, 74.
52 Bondar, Portret Starogo Goroda, 83.
state's dependence on Cossacks for internal policing became even greater during the 1905 revolution.

The importance of the Bicentenary monument for the Kuban Cossacks is evidenced by the fact that it was the first to be destroyed upon the arrival of the Soviets at the end of the Civil War, and the first to be rebuilt during the post-Soviet revival. The monument connects a Kuban Cossack narrative that establishes their presence in the region one hundred years prior to the relocation of the Zaporozhian Cossacks to broader Imperial narratives of occupation and control in the region. The Imperial iconography of the obelisk is more explicit compared to other Imperial-era monuments. Besides the text and proclamations by Nicholas II and the Ataman of the Kuban Cossacks on the side, the obelisk is crowned with an a golden double eagle that represents “central power, protected by worldly and heavenly authorities, domination and violence, on the one side, fear of revenge from the subjugated peoples of the periphery on the other. [...] The Eagle manifests the union of disparate territories, forced together and governed by the principles of Orthodoxy and Autocracy.” The obelisk is the dominant symbol in a central part of the city, connecting the traditional values of the Imperial state to the Cossacks, who fashion themselves as defenders of those traditional values. The critical importance of the monument is in the legitimacy that it grants the Kuban Cossacks as a long-standing feature of the region. The 1896 bicentenary, 200 years after the supposed migration of Kuban Cossacks in 1696, monumentalizes the historical narrative of the Kuban

53 Hirn, Soil and Soul, 23.
Cossacks for both Cossacks and non-Cossacks alike. It demonstrates the power of such symbolic historical claims.

Critically, the formal decree in 1860 creating the Kuban Cossack host is overlooked in this monument. Instead, the obelisk instead makes a much older historical claim by dating the existence of the Kuban Cossacks to 1696, when the first Cossacks from the Don region began to settle in the Northern Kuban. This historical claim, which can be seen as an effort to legitimize a longer history in the region, links the entire history of the Kuban Cossacks to the autocracy. Additionally, it provides Kuban Cossacks a much broader notion of their own history, a history where all of the Cossacks who settled in the Kuban region before the formation of the Kuban Host were not only united politically and temporally into a single host, to become part of a larger Kuban Cossack history. Such a genealogical claim comes in the face of the much longer existence of Cossacks within the region. Using imperial sources, the Revival era Cossack scholar I. Averin wrote:

Starting from 1792, the North-West Caucasus becomes a place of intensive formation of the Kuban, a new regional Cossack group. By 1850, 25,000 of Black-Sea Cossacks (including 5.5 thousand former Zaporozhian Cossacks), 3,500 of Yekaterinoslav Cossacks, 1 thousand families of the Don Cossacks, and 98,000 of Novorossiyan peasants (primarily Ukrainian) were relocated here. In the Black Sea Host in Kuban were recruited also Caucasian mountaineers, out of whom the Mountaineer Host was formed in 1827. In 1860, the Black Sea Cossack Host was renamed the Kuban Cossack Host, and its territory was increased by means of Circassia where 11,500 of peasant and soldier families were relocated in 1862.54

The Kuban Cossacks were well aware of their youth as a Cossack host and as such needed to establish symbols that created an impression of an older lineage within the

54 Averin, “Reki i Mosty.”
region, not as a disparate group of relocated Cossacks recently reorganized into a single host, but as a single group whose roots can be traced back 200 years.

Divorced from their Imperial relationship, the rebuilt monuments are no longer the signifiers of legitimacy and power that the Kuban Cossack Host derived from the Imperial center, but are themselves the signified source of legitimacy for the Kuban Cossack Revival. They denote the lasting existence of the Kuban Cossacks through the Soviet period, bridging their presence in the region from the Imperial to the post-Soviet era, and demonstrating a unique claim to the traditions and history of Krasnodar Krai not available to the majority non-Cossack population. The progression of signifier to signified can be seen in the reconstruction of the Bicentennial Obelisk, where the date was modified in its second iteration so that on one side, rather than reading 1696 to 1896, it reads 1696 to 1996. This revised dating connects the apocryphal origins of the first Kuban Cossacks from the late Imperial era to the post-Soviet present, a historical claim on the region unbroken by the Soviet “interruption.”

A Summary of the Monuments’ Significance

In each of the three cases presented, the monument presents a structured relationship between the Imperial center and the Kuban Cossacks. However, it is important to remember that all of these Imperial symbols were funded locally and constructed as symbolic gifts either honoring specific visits by Tsars or figures
pivotal in the formation of the Kuban Cossacks. The imagined relationship could be one between master and servant, where the Tsars controlled the Kuban Cossacks through relocation, command, and appointment. However, this construction of the past was ultimately beneficial for both sides because the Imperial autocracy granted legitimacy to the Kuban Cossacks through a treaty promising the Kuban lands, and lent credence to their status of defenders of autocracy and the Russian Empire. Their relationship with the center therefore gave the Kuban Cossacks superior social and political power in relation to the non-Cossack population in the region.

In the context of the internalized view of the Kuban Cossacks’ relationship with the Imperial autocracy, the reconstruction of these monuments during the Revival can be better understood better now because that relationship no longer exists. The replacement relationship between the Kuban Cossacks and the Russian state is markedly different as the Kuban Cossack Revival was self-initiated and independent from centralized state control while the original Kuban Cossacks formed under Imperial orders. Legitimacy is no longer derived from the state but rather from the cultural and historical presence of the Kuban Cossacks in the region in the pre-Soviet era.
Alterning Soviet Symbols for a Post-Soviet Krasnodar

The selection of the few Soviet monuments in Krasnodar to be demolished was a careful rejection of certain aspects of the Soviet past. Indeed, the demolition of a Soviet monument made as much of a political statement about regional history as the restoration of imperial monuments. The Kuban Cossacks’ decision to preserve and use Soviet monuments became a way of reintegrating the Kuban Cossacks into Soviet historical memory. This was especially important in that it connected them to the central experiences of the Soviet period that the entire population of the Soviet Union shared, especially to that of the Great Patriotic War. From this culling of symbols, the Kuban Cossacks crafted a narrative rejecting the larger structures of the Soviet Union, such as the Communist Party and Soviet state apparatus—both of which oppressed Cossack identity—while at the same time remaining faithful to the experiences that defined Soviet historical memory. This served to demonstrate that the Kuban Cossacks had a common past that was shared across Russian, Soviet, and Cossack identities.

The biggest alteration to the Soviet symbols of central Krasnodar is undoubtedly the removal of the statue of Lenin outside the Legislative Assembly. Chronologically, it is significant because, in comparison to many other Soviet-era statues across the former Soviet Union, it was removed later, in 2007. Moreover, as opposed to a unilateral action by the Kuban Cossacks, the removal of the Lenin statue was a planned event with broader governmental support. Erected in 1956, the Lenin statue in downtown Krasnodar was one of the ubiquitous Lenin statues constructed
across the Soviet Union, the most easily recognizable and prominent symbols of Soviet authority in squares and plazas across the country. In the “Soviet Pantheon,” Lenin was a symbol of party primacy. Such statues became obvious targets for removal in the early post-Soviet period by anti-Soviet groups, but the removal of the Lenin statue outside the Legislative Assembly was not a spontaneous action by the Kuban Cossacks early in the Revival. Lenin statues were particularly targeted in some post-Soviet Republics, especially the Baltic States, but most of the Lenin statues in Russia remained in place, and even in independent Ukraine, many of the most conspicuous statues of Lenin stayed in the capital Kiev. Rather than being torn down in the turbulent days of the early 1990s, the removal of the statue of Lenin in 2007 was a planned affair to coincide with the reconstruction of the statue of Catherine the Great. The base of the Lenin statue, converted into a large fountain, has itself become a new monument, especially as its original purpose can still be seen (fig. 2.5). The contrast between the ornate bronze statue of Catherine the Great and the Kuban Cossacks across from the base/fountain in front of the Legislative Assembly is quite striking. The imposing Catherine stares at the empty space where the Lenin once stood, and provides a powerful, if not entirely intentional, symbolic contrast between the country's Imperial and Soviet past and the Russian present.

Unlike the reconstruction of Imperial monuments, the destruction of the statue of Lenin came with vocal opposition from the local branch of the Communist Party of Russia, whose members were angry at the removal of such an important Soviet

55 Vladimir Gromov, conversation with author, 1 July 2013.
56 Ibid.
symbol from the center of the city. There was even dissent about the decision within the Kuban Cossack Army. Vladimir Gromov, the Kuban Cossack academic-turned-politician was then still head of the Kuban Cossack Army and involved in the debate. In interviews with the author, Gromov denied that it was his policy that led to the removal of Lenin and pointed rather to one of the rival factions within the Kuban Cossacks, who distinguished themselves as “White” (referencing the anti-Bolshevik coalition in the Russian Civil War of 1918-1921). Gromov claimed that it was one of the White Kuban Cossack leaders, Evgen Nogai, whose organization exists outside of the Kuban Cossack Army, who pushed for the destruction of the statue in 2007.

Gromov’s comments reveal the efforts taken to cultivate a positive image of Cossacks for the entire community, including non-Cossacks, even if it means opposing the destruction of a symbol of Soviet dominance. In opposing the removal of the statue and denying his involvement in the actions, Gromov sought to distance himself from more radical Cossack narratives. The term that Gromov assigns himself is “Red” Cossack, a term that denotes not an affinity for the Soviet Union, but a support of Kuban Cossack identities and narratives that do not outright reject the experiences of Soviet society as well as a willingness to work closely with the regional government. In practical policy making, this choice translates into accepting that the Kuban Cossacks, like every other group within the Soviet Union, shared narratives, memories, and even symbols. Acknowledging the lingering remains of the

57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
Soviet past brings the Kuban Cossacks into the region’s mainstream. What the diverse positions on the Lenin statue also illustrate is that, even after consolidation, the Kuban Cossacks should not be treated as a monolithic group. While the Kuban Cossack Army is a primary actor, factions like the “Whites” or “Greens” (Kuban Cossacks who identify with local stranitsas rather than to connections with either “Reds” or “Whites”) exist to contest the narrative put out by the Kuban Cossack political and academic apparatus that was centralized in the Kuban Cossack Army.

The Great Patriotic War and Managing Memory

Cossack rejection of aspects of the Soviet narrative, and the figure of Lenin in particular, should be contrasted by their protection and promotion of Soviet-era monuments to the Great Patriotic War. Rather than removing and replacing the Soviet symbolism, the Revival integrated the Kuban Cossacks' war experience into the narrative of Cossacks as protectors of the nation from foreign threat.

Besides the preservation of the physical symbolic structures, like the city’s Eternal Flame and the central Great Patriotic War Memorial, the major commemorations of World War II (notably Victory Day on May 9 and remembrance services on June 22, the start of the invasion of the Soviet Union) have become major expressions of Kuban Cossack identity and pride (fig. 2.6). On these occasions, the Kuban Cossack Army leadership stands beside the elected political leadership of the Krasnodar Krai, in full view of the rest of the non-Cossack population. The Soviet
monuments serve as the designated spaces for commemorating the war, especially since many of Krasnodar's downtown consists of refurbished Imperial building, post-war buildings and new high-rises, and there is little else left in the city that commemorates the war. Though the monuments to which the Kuban Cossacks pay deference are distinctly Soviet and without reference to the Kuban Cossack involvement in the war, the Kuban Cossacks positioned themselves as the keepers of the war legacy (alongside actual war veterans) by using costume and role-play. The image of the Cossacks as the historical defenders of Russia and their active military involvement in post-Soviet conflicts, regional policing, and military parades, makes memorials of the Great Patriotic War pivotal in displays of patriotism and militaristic pride.

Such reverence for the Great Patriotic War created substantive changes in how the architectural landscape of downtown Krasnodar developed in the post-Soviet era. For instance, the former site of the main Orthodox cathedral of the Kuban Cossacks, the St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, which was demolished 1930, became a park dedicated to the heroes of the Great Patriotic War in the post-war Soviet era.\textsuperscript{61} Rather than alienate non-Cossack inhabitants of the city by destroying the park and rebuilding their Cathedral, the Kuban Cossacks chose to move the location of their cathedral over one half mile away to ensure the park’s protection.

It is important to consider also that Krasnodar was an active site of conflict in the war, occupied for seven months by Wehrmacht forces. War remembrance was an important position for the Kuban Cossacks to promulgate. The Cossacks were also Soviet citizens and endured the shared trauma of war that defined the Soviet

\textsuperscript{61} Bondar, \textit{Portret Starogo Goroda}, 55.
experience. By expressing their identity through their costumed presence at Great Patriotic War commemorations, the Kuban Cossacks both honored their shared experiences and demonstrated their distinct identity in the region. In this way, they both connected with and marked their distinction from non-Cossack Russians.

From Yekaterinodar to Krasnodar

Of all the symbols and monuments to the Soviet past that remained in the city, the largest and most impactful was left unchanged by the Kuban Cossacks: the name of the city, Krasnodar. Almost immediately after the Bolsheviks seized the city, they changed its Imperial name of Yekaterinodar to Krasnodar. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the city did not change its name back, but this decision was not reached without extensive debate among the Kuban Cossacks. These discussions initially began in 1992 at a major meeting of Kuban Cossack groups, the Kuban Cossack Rada. Cities, towns, and villages across the former Soviet Union were undergoing name-changes: Leningrad became St. Petersburg and Sverdlovsk became Yekaterinburg. In a similar fashion, the Kuban Cossacks argued about whether to restore the name of Yekaterinodar, with prominent figures in the Kuban Cossack community, such as the head of the Kuban Cossack Choir Viktor Zakharchenko, asking to call a vote on the matter to the Kuban Cossacks. The vote fell by the wayside of the 1992 Rada, however, as other more pressing matters prevented

consensus. The most pressing of these was a need for a cohesive organization of the many Cossack groups. The consolidation the disparate groups and factions that had spawned during the Revival into a centralized organization only took place a little more than a year prior, in 1990, when the Kuban Cossack Army formed. Renaming the city was overshadowed and it appears that Krasnodar will likely keep its name for the foreseeable future.

Even if they demanded a return to Krasnodar’s Imperial namesake, the Kuban Cossacks would likely have been unsuccessful in their attempt. The regional government in the early 1990s had little love for the Kuban Cossack Revival and saw it as a potential political rival that would demand attention, access, and privileges—a fear that became a reality by the late 1990s. In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet collapse, the Kuban Cossacks still lacked the political organization needed to effect a major change like the formal election of a single Kuban Cossack Ataman. The formation of the centralized organization, the Kuban Cossack Army, occurred only a year prior and competing factions and organizations contested the role of the Army. The Kuban Cossacks, moreover, also faced the reality that they were at best a small minority within the region and most of the ethnic Russians in Krasnodar had settled in the city during the Soviet period. Therefore, much of the population who would have had a living memory of the city being called Yekaterinodar had either died or been relocated in the Russian Civil War, Decossackization, the famine of 1932, or the Great Patriotic War. Simply put, the pre-Soviet population was so altered by the Soviet experience that even the Kuban Cossacks recognized that attempting to

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63 Ibid.
64 Vladimir Gromov, conversation with author, 27 June 2013.
rename the city was futile, even if it was symbolically powerful. It was an unwise political battle in that it would undermine the Cossacks' attempts to negotiate a working relationship with other groups of Krasnodar Krai in the post-Soviet period.

The official name of the city may not have been changed, but the Imperial name, Yekaterinodar, is represented throughout the city center on the former Imperial emblem of Catherine, which is the city's symbol. This emblem embellishes trashcans, fence posts, and many of the decorative items in the downtown, governmental area of the city. Though not the official emblem of the city, the Cyrillic “ё,” shown in the typographical style of Catherine the Great’s monogram, neutralizes the lack of an official referendum to revert the city’s name back to its Imperial namesake (fig. 2.7). Though the city may still be named Krasnodar, the “ё” is a clear reminder of the link between the city’s modern municipal embellishments and its Imperial origins. Though the city did not formally change its name, to visitors’ eyes, the city center has restored Imperial symbols, replacing some of its recent Soviet past.

An Old Cathedral in a New Space

Compared to all the churches and monuments that were restored by the Kuban Cossacks and their non-Cossack allies in Krasnodar, very few new buildings were added to the topology of monuments and symbols in the center of the city. The restoration of historical monuments and the culling or deconsecrating of Soviet monuments took precedence over the creation of wholly new symbols. It was also
easier to mobilize both funding and political will for historical renovation than for the uncertainty of new projects. The largest of the post-Soviet constructions involved the reconstruction of the historical Cathedral dedicated to the Kuban Cossacks, the St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, but even this was not an entirely new project. The cathedral was not rebuilt in its historic location, but in an entirely different part of the city center, altering the symbolic landscape of the historic areas of downtown Krasnodar (fig. 2.8).

The St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, which was moved to prevent the destruction of the Great Patriotic War memorial, served as a replacement for the city's Resurrection Cathedral (constructed between 1853 and 1872), which by its size and extravagance—an all-white cathedral with golden onion domes towering above all other buildings, was the most prominent architectural point in the old city. The rebuilding of the Cathedral was a three-year process (2003 to 2006) that had the support of the Kuban Cossack Army and the Orthodox Church. This coalition of interests became the cornerstone of the Kuban Cossack revival as Cossacks sought to reestablish themselves in the post-Soviet environment as the defenders of Orthodoxy.

The Cathedral is a symbolic fusion of Cossack, Imperial, and Orthodox styles in the veneration of St. Alexander Nevsky, a Russian prince and an Orthodox saint. The importance of the Prince-saint as the Kuban Cossacks’ patron can be seen in the context of the pre-Imperial/Imperial dichotomy of Russian symbols: “The myth shifted from the saintly princes of Russia to the imperial rulers of Rome and Constantinople as the models and justification for the Muscovite Tsar. The medieval doctrine of Christ-centered monarchy, however, provided a field of symbols and

65 Bondar, Portret Starogo Goroda, 55.
historical precedent which later generations drew upon when the external
environment was appropriate for their use.”66 The St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral,
originally constructed in the medieval Russian-Byzantine style to honor a medieval
prince, is still decidedly part of an Imperial pantheon of symbols. Nevsky’s protection
of Orthodox Russia from Catholic invasion mirrors the role of the Tsar as the paternal
protector of all-Russians and the defender of Orthodoxy and the Kuban Cossacks as
the protector of the Tsar and the traditions of Orthodox Russia.

In post-Soviet Krasnodar, the new Church stands at the end of the city's major
thoroughfare, Krasnaya Street, and overlooks the monument to Catherine the Great,
the fountain-base of the Lenin statue, and the Legislative Assembly. The Cathedral
dominates the Legislative Assembly, dwarfing the building, and in combination with
the statue of Catherine the Great across from the Assembly, the governmental center
of the region is surrounded by symbols of the Cossacks. The space devoted to federal
governance is contrasted with the Kuban Cossack extra-governmental framework,
creating a contrast between two worlds and two sources of power.

A Cossack Flag for the Region

The Kuban Cossacks were also able to work with the larger Krasnodar Krai
government, enacting a symbolic change to influence the design of the post-Soviet
flag of the Krasnodar Krai. The flag, first formally used in 1995, combined elements
of both the Kuban Cossack Imperial heritage and the region’s time as the Kuban

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People’s Republic during the Russian Civil War (1918-1919). The three colors that made up the tricolor of the Kuban People’s Republic represented different aspects that came to form the Kuban Cossacks as a distinct Cossack host: blue for the Don Cossack heritage of the Kuban Cossacks, pink for the Zaporozhian origins of the Kuban Cossacks, and green for the indigenous Circassians, whose traditions and costume were adapted by the Kuban Cossacks during the conquest (fig. 2.9). The post-Soviet flag includes the tricolor of the Kuban People’s Republic as the background to the Imperial Coat of Arms, which has also become the coat of arms of Krasnodar Krai. The coat of arms incorporates the Imperial Eagle, the battle standards of each of the Tsars since Catherine the Great, a crown, a fortress, and a bulwa, a mace that served as the symbol of authority for the Ataman of the Zaporozhian (and later Kuban) host.

Following the Kuban Revival, the flag of the Don Republic from the Russian Civil War is used in Rostov region to the north. However, unlike the Don Cossacks, the Kuban Cossacks incorporated a double layer of symbolism into their flag. Whereas the Rostov flag only draws parallels to the Civil War independence of the Don Cossacks, the Kuban Cossacks include symbols of the Civil War alongside symbols of their connection to the Imperial state.

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67 Vladimir Gromov, conversation with author, 16 June 2013.
68 Ibid.
A Post-Soviet Symbol

Only one major statue was placed in downtown Krasnodar that was wholly new. The smallest yet most interesting of the post-Soviet inventions is a monument dedicated to all Kuban Cossack Atamans outside the former Soviet administration building (fig. 2.10). The statue depicts an ataman on a horse, with one arm holding a bulwa. It is bereft of any Imperial symbols (save the symbols in the coat of arms) and intentionally honors Kuban Cossack leaders without reference to their connection to the Imperial center. This represents the Revival’s presentation of the Kuban Cossacks as an ethnos rather than a social group. This statue serves as the endpoint to the “Hour of Kuban Glory,” and is the endpoint to the Kuban Cossack symbolic development, producing something entirely organic to the Kuban Cossack Revival. It expresses a desire to be seen as something more than an Imperial vestige. Instead, the Revival projects the Cossacks as an ethnos that bears the region's cultural capital and appeals to both Cossacks and non-Cossack Russians.
Accompanying Images

Figure 1.1: Graduating students of a Kuban Cossack Cadet School being blessed by an Orthodox priest in a ceremony in the center of Krasnodar

Figure 2.1: An advertisement in Krasnodar by the Resorts of Krasnodar Krai that reads “Kuban- Blessed Krai, my region.” In the foreground is a man dressed in a Kuban Cossack uniform and a woman in a traditional peasant dress. In the background is the Cathedral of Alexander Nevsky.
Figure 2.2: The Statue of Catherine the Great. Built in 1907 and rebuilt in 2007.
Figure 2.3: The Triumphal Arch or Tsar’s Gate erected for Alexander III in 1888. Rebuilt in 2008.

Figure 2.4: The Bicentennial Obelisk. Built in 1897 and rebuilt in 1999.
Figure 2.5: Base of a Lenin Statue in front of the Legislative Assembly. The Lenin Statue was removed in 2007 and the base was converted into a fountain.

Figure 2.6: Kuban Cossacks in full military dress carrying wreaths as part of a Remembrance Ceremony on June 22\textsuperscript{nd} at the Eternal Flame in Krasnodar. The date marks the start of Operation Barbarossa and the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany in 1941.
Figure 2.7: Imperial Monogram of Catherine the Great on a public bench. The monogram is used as a decorative symbol for Krasnodar’s Imperial era name, Yekaterinodar.

Figure 2.8: The Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. Completed in 1870, destroyed in 1932, and rebuilt in 2006 in a new location, adjacent to the Legislative Assembly.
Figure 2.9: Official Flag of the Krasnodar Krai: This flag was developed to replace the designated Soviet flag after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The blue represents the Don Cossacks, the pink the Zaporozhian Cossacks and Green the indigenous Circassians. The tricolor was originally the flag of the Kuban People’s Republic during its brief independence in 1919. The addition of the heraldry of the Kuban Cossacks is new to the post-Soviet Era.
Figure 2.10: Statue dedicated to all previous Atamans of the Kuban Cossacks. The monument is completely new to the city, constructed in the post-Soviet period.
Figure 3.1: Cossacks performing in the Hour of Cossack Glory in front of the Statue of Catherine the Great in Krasnodar.
Chapter Three

Rehearsing Cossack Glory

Every Sunday morning in Krasnodar, men in military fatigues and armed with *shashkas*, the curved saber of the Cossack soldier, begin blade drills in front of the Cathedral of St. Alexander Nevsky. After twenty minutes of sword drills, these young members of the Kuban Cossack paramilitary police leave the square to don the Imperial-era uniforms of the Kuban Cossacks: a reddish-pink *Cherkesska* overcoat, black trousers, and black *papakha* hat. Their reappearance in full uniform on the square signals the beginning of the “Hour of Cossack Glory” a half-mile long parade of Kuban Cossacks, mounted and on foot, marching to the beat of an accompanying band, also in uniform. The procession along Krasnaya Boulevard is a spectacle of horse tricks, marching band performances and sword dancing (fig. 3.1).

To an outside observer, the Hour of Cossack Glory, with its antiquated uniforms and impressive displays, appears like any other historical reenactment. But the parade is more than entertainment: It showcases the Kuban Cossacks as a powerful presence in the region, with enough influence to close off the city center every weekend for their performance. The parade allows the Kuban Cossacks to present themselves as the keepers and protectors of Russia’s traditional values.

Just as the men marching in the Hour of Kuban Glory are performing the roles of Imperial-era Kuban Cossack troops, individual Kuban Cossacks volunteered to fight alongside Abkhaz rebels in Abkhazia in post-Soviet conflicts, fulfilling the
idealized notion of the militaristic Cossack. The many conflicts of the post-Soviet nations provided many opportunities to turn role-playing into real military action, thus fulfilling the Cossack ideal of the battle-hardened, militaristic, Imperial-era Cossack who fights for the Motherland. Real combat became a way to restore the prestige of the Kuban Cossacks and beyond mere performance. As the post-Soviet era progressed, the Kuban Cossack paramilitary police institutionalized this idealized militarism by undertaking a mission of “protecting” the Russian “frontier” from non-Russian immigrants and establishing a brand of law and order consistent in harshness and severity with their Imperial counterparts. The Hour is a military parade by a group that vaunts militarism but has no formal military of its own, organized by a Kuban Cossack Army that is not part of the official security apparatus of Russia, yet has several thousand men policing Krasnodar Krai.

This chapter focuses on the place of folk tradition, historical role-play, and militarism in reshaping Kuban Cossack identity in the post-Soviet period. Cossack role-playing extends beyond the theatrical world of marches, uniforms, and choir performances. Cossacks were involved in post-Soviet conflicts in Abkhazia, formed anti-immigrant paramilitary groups, and reformed the Kuban Cossack Army. These actions—which had very real effects in the region and beyond—also fulfilled an idealized self-image more actively than just wearing historical costume when carrying out the activities of the “ideal” Kuban Cossack, or reproducing the historical Kuban Cossack Army in a modern context. This chapter describes political organizations, folk music, and engagement in armed conflict as aspects of the Kuban Cossacks’
revival, and uses role-play and historical reenactment as a way to understand Cossack political motivations.

Role-play and historical reenactment are key components in shaping Kuban Cossack militarism. During the Imperial period, militarism shaped the costumes, organizations, and even many of the folk songs and dances of the historical Kuban Cossacks. The Revival attempted to recreate those elements in the post-Soviet environment, despite lacking the Imperial social privileges, power, and population. The chapter begins by discussing Kuban Cossack role-play and reenactment in easily recognizable and familiar forms (i.e. costumes, parades, and folk music), and continues by analyzing more ambiguous forms of role-play (i.e. Cossack political organizations and paramilitary activity) to consider how role-play shapes the identity and history of a group or region.

Historical reenactment, by standard definition, is a form of role-play that does not extend beyond the theatrical. Historical reenactment provides access to knowledge of other times by kinetically performing the past: Both the participant and audience know the reenactment is not reality but still find the experience engaging. However, as Johan Huizinga suggests in his pivotal book on ludic interactions (games and play), *Homo Ludens*, reenactment can extend beyond performance when the boundaries between game and non-game are unclear and elements of games and play are found in other aspects of cultures and societies. Huizinga notes, while describing the ludic elements of litigation, how the British judges’ costume shapes the court:

The judge’s wig is rather a survival of the mediaeval headdress worn by lawyers in England, called the coif, which was originally a close-fitting white cap. A vestige of this is still present in the little white edging at the rim of the wig. The judge’s wig, however, is more than a mere relic of antiquated
professional dress… It transforms the wearer into another “being”. And it is by no means only very ancient feature, which the strange sense of tradition so peculiar to the British has preserved in law.69

The role-play of the English court, even concerning aspects of the judge’s wig, shapes the reality of the proceedings and inversely alters the mindset of the participant. The costume establishes the nature of the performance and by extension the nature of the legal proceedings, “transforming” them.

Similarly, Kuban Cossacks reenactments extend beyond entertainment into the social and political realm. The identity expression of the Kuban Cossacks extends beyond wearing the traditional costume and marching with military precision. Such activity reshapes the identity of the participant while the symbols and activities of role-play form readily-identifiable aspects of the Kuban Cossack culture that the individual can internalize through reenactment. As many interview subjects relayed to the author, the Kuban Cossack in uniform must exhibit the traits and beliefs that the costume represents to be worthy of wearing it. To the Chairman of the Cossacks, Pavel Frolov, the uniform acknowledges lineage by linking the Imperial era to the present; to the Vice-Ataman of Education Konstantin Yakovlevich, it reminds the wearer how to behave and what to value, especially for Cossack cadets; and to Ataman Gromov, it does both of these things, as well as identifying those within the Kuban Cossack community from those outside.70 These traits revolve around idealized conceptions of the historical Imperial-era Cossack, who at his core is a deeply Orthodox, masculine, and militaristic figure.

70 Vladimir Gromov, conversation with author 27 June 2013, Pavel Frolov, Konstantin Yakovlevich, conversations with the author, 18 June 2013, Pavel Frolov passed away on March 28th, 2014. His death was announced on twitter by the Regional Governor, Aleksandr Tkachev.
The romanticized image of the pre-Soviet Kuban Cossack and the values associated with it make the role-play and actualized manifestation of the values of this image popular among both Cossack and non-Cossack Russian men. This romantic image has little room for women as they are intentionally left out of the Cossack world, save for the domestic roles expected of a good Cossack wife. Strictly enforced gender norms extend to all forms of Cossack role-play. As Laura J. Olson noted on her work on Cossack folk performances in *Performing Russia*, “male Cossacks wear the uniform identifying them as Cossacks, and the uniform’s styling shows which host they are from; since the late nineteenth century, however, for women dress has not played a role as a marker of Cossack identity. Conversely, the symbol of the Russian peasant has come to be female, and the styling of the female dress most clearly identifies the wearer’s regional origins.”

To put this in the context of the Kuban Cossacks, men identifying as Cossack can wear the uniform and be easily recognizable as Kuban Cossacks, but women in their traditional dress would be only identified as peasants from the Kuban. The women can only be peasants, and are excluded from directly participating in the formation of Cossack identity save as the support to the Cossack men.

Despite the near total exclusion of women, the Revival’s role-playing was popular both within and outside Cossack communities. The Revival may have been a political and social movement, but both Cossack and Russian communities enjoyed the renewed interest in Cossack folk music and dance. Though such shared performance forged a connection between Cossack and ethnic Russian, it also pushed

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Cossack hosts like the Kuban Cossacks to centralize their organizational structures so that they were the primary controllers of Cossack culture and identity. The Cossack fear of losing control of the cultural capital that developed during the Revival to non-Cossacks became a key motivator for centralization. From education to parades to stanitsa choirs, the Kuban Cossack Army sought to be the sole heritors of Cossack historical and cultural capital.

Perhaps the greatest success of the Revival is the actualization of the idealized Cossack through volunteerism in foreign conflicts, paramilitarism, and the propagation of “Cossack values” to the broader non-Cossack population. These values sought to bridge Kuban Cossack historical identity with Russian Orthodoxy so that Cossack culture could be shared with a non-Cossack population without threatening the ethno-cultural identity of Kuban Cossacks. As a unique “ethnos,” the Cossacks believe they have a unique set of values to instill in the region’s youth, emphasizing religiosity, masculinity and militarism, and rejection of non-Russian values, particularly liberal or Western values.

**Cossack Role-play as Regional Security**

Designated as “auxiliary” police, the Kuban Cossacks working for the Krasnodar Krai government function more as paramilitary forces than police, as they frequently carry out extralegal violence and intimidation for the local government as an oft-repeated quote by Krasnodar Krai’s governor Alexander Tkachyov notes,
“What you can’t do, the Cossacks can.” A 2012 declaration became the final major step of a fifteen-year federal and regional process of integrating the Cossack’s intra-host recreation of militarism through vigilantism and volunteerism. This made it a function of the regional government, so that Kuban Cossack manpower could deal with crime, political dissent, and immigrants deemed undesirable by the Tkachyov government with official state approval.

The status of the Kuban Cossacks as paramilitary police within Krasnodar Krai was an integral part to fulfilling the Kuban Cossacks’ Imperial role as keepers of law and order within the region, but their role as paramilitary police also allowed them to fulfill an even greater purpose as the “defenders of the Russian frontier.”

Revival literature often features an idealized form of the Imperial-era Cossack as a protector of Russia’s frontier from exterior forces, which are hostile to Russia’s growth and Orthodoxy. The Cossack perched on a watchtower becomes a visual cue for the figure of the Cossack as the defender of the Russian frontier, featured in books and illustrations of Cossack material.

The legal territorial definition of the Krasnodar Region only further reinforces the historical image of the Kuban region as the bordered edge to a larger Russian state. Whereas other Russia regions are administratively divided into oblasts or, if the region contains a titular nationality, republics, Krasnodar is one of the few regions with the designation of krai, meaning edge, border, or brink. While there is no legal difference between how a krai and oblast function, the term is a carry-over from the Imperial period when Krasnodar Krai was part of the larger Caucasus Krai, which

then comprised the Krasnodar Krai and other provinces in the Soviet period. The border mentality that is a central component of Kuban Cossack identity and history has been preserved in the formal name of the region, which changed from being Caucasus Krai and Northern Caucasus Krai in the Imperial era to become Krasnodar Krai. Continuity is then preserved from the Imperial period, if only in its designation as a krai.

Even before their official designation as paramilitary police by Tkachyov, the Kuban Cossacks had tacit local approval to engage with the Meskhetian Turks that settled in the Krasnodar region in the early years of the post-Soviet period as the Turks became subjects of intense discrimination justified through this ethno-national framework. The Meskhetian Turks, who lived on the Georgian-Turkish border before being deported to Uzbekistan in 1944, originally came to the Krasnodar region in small numbers in the 1970s as farm workers, a practice encouraged by regional officials. This smaller population grew dramatically after 1998 as Meskhetians fleeing anti-Meskhetian violence in Uzbekistan moved to Krasnodar with the expectation of returning back to the Georgia after its independence. Newly independent Georgia refused to let the Meskhetians return and they began to settle in the region, with their population reaching between 15,000 and 17,000 by 2004 in the Krasnodar Krai.

The Meskhetian Turks faced pronounced discrimination shortly after arriving in the region. Their numbers, their sudden presence in the post-Soviet scene, their inability to speak Russian, and their status as an already-persecuted ethnic group

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74 Ibid., 40.
before arriving in the Krasnodar Krai made them a highly visible but vulnerable minority that had been targeted in every country they had settled in, including their native Georgia. While they are legally citizens of the Russian Federation, they are regarded and treated as a nationless people who “don’t belong” in the region. Thus from the late 1990s through the 2000s, the Kuban Cossacks, frequently working with local governments, carried harassed, intimidated, and occasionally resorted to violence to intentionally drive the Meskhetian Turk population out of the Krasnodar Krai. This ethnic targeting has led to the departure of between 10,000 and 20,000 Turks by 2004, a feat which the Kuban Cossack Army leadership proudly admits, as the former head of the Kuban Cossack Army, Vladimir Gromov, boasted to the author, “Thanks to the Cossacks, they [Meskhetian Turks] are not living here.”

The Kuban Cossacks refashioned the Cossack as a defender of the Russia frontier from foreign enemies into a contemporarily practice of anti-immigration activities. For the Kuban Cossack Army, the modern campaigns against the Meskhetians and the Imperial-era frontier defense are conceptually similar as both sought to protect Russia, and by extension Russianness, embodied in values tied to Orthodoxy, from perceived hostile and alien foes. The contemporary post-Soviet fears of Russian nationalists, namely mass foreign immigration into Russia, merged with the frontier-protector aspect of Kuban Cossack identity, integrating Kuban Cossack desires with a broader base of anti-immigrant non-Cossack Russian nationalists. The Kuban Cossack leadership used socially resonant fears that foreigners would overrun the Russian population, that Russian schools no longer had any Russian-speaking

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75 Vladimir Gromov, conversation with author, 27 June 2013.
76 Ibid., Koriouchkina, “Meskhetian Turks,” 39.
pupils, and that there was a connection between the war in Chechnya and the loyalties of Muslim immigrants, to validate their presence as a paramilitary force. The regional government formally legitimized this presence in 2012.

Reimaging the Cossacks

Observers outside of the Cossack communities interpreted their revival as a turn towards the Imperial. Though the Kuban Cossacks saw their Imperial heritage as foundational to their revival through reenactment of traditions, some non-Cossacks saw a reenactment of Imperial traditions as a literal return to Imperial social structures. Oleg Orlov, a prominent voice for human rights in Russia who originally worked to rehabilitate and commemorate political victims of the USSR, wrote in April of 1993 that, “the Cossacks, as a militarized social class with a special system for performing state services and special land-use regulations, may under certain conditions really become a support for Russia, but for an Imperial, class-based Russia. If this is the case, there will inevitably follow a demand for the revival of nationality-based militarized formations.” His critique views the Revival as aiming for a return to the social and legal status of Cossacks in pre-revolutionary Russia—a restoration of Cossacks as a class rather than an ethnicity. His rejection of the Cossacks in modern Russia stems from a fear that a group that returns to serve the state in a militarized role will, in turn, receive privileges and land above other groups.

Cossackdom is still understood through an Imperial rather than ethno-national lens, thus making its references and connections to the symbols of the Imperial period form different connotations outside the Cossack *krug*, as it reinforces a perception of return to the Imperial social-legal status.\textsuperscript{78} To Orlov, the Cossacks did not reinterpret their Imperial counterparts, but rather begat a new Imperial system that the Cossacks sought to create: the role-play of Cossacks as a reformed Imperial entity to transform both themselves and Russian society. Orlov recognized that the uniformed Cossacks were more than just enthusiastic historical reenactors, but a dedicated group seeking to reestablish themselves. What he misinterpreted was the role that the Revival-era Cossacks sought in Russian society, mistaking a fondness for Imperial symbols and costume for an actual desire to return to the Imperial class structure. Such is the power of Cossack role-play that the reuse of old symbols may be interpreted as a desire to return to the old system.

So compelling was this imagined historical narrative of Cossack unity in Russia that it extended to actual political attempts to form alliances between hosts in the early 1990s to fulfill their historical “purpose” in acting as the vanguard frontier of the Russian state. These attempts, moreover, came before the orders and wishes of the Russian state. This political manifestation of imagined historical destiny was demonstrated in the summer of 1993 as Cossacks from the Caucasus, both the Old Line (i.e. Terek and Stavropol) and New Line (i.e. Cossacks from the Upper Kuban) united to form a United Cossack movement. They endeavored to fight Chechen and Dagestani independence movements, but also to push out non-Russian refugees from “temporarily occupied Cossack lands”—areas such as Stavropol, a Krai bordering |

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
Krasnodar.\textsuperscript{79} The Terek and Stavropol Cossacks fought in the First Chechen War (December 1994 - August 1996) and all targeted immigrant groups, but ultimately their alliance fell apart. The Kuban Cossacks, distant from the Chechnya conflict and unwilling to appear subservient to Russian President Vladimir Yeltsin by fighting for the Russian Federation, attempted to arbitrate between the Terek Cossacks and the Chechens, mediating prisoner exchanges between the two.\textsuperscript{80} Though such an alliance was compelling on a conceptual level, the realities of each Cossack host varied by their location, and the Kuban Cossacks, far from Chechnya, saw less reason to join the conflict compared to the Terek Cossacks, who had a long, antagonistic history with their Chechen neighbors.

The Caucasus Cossack actions were frequently more aggressive than the central Russian government was willing to tolerate. Rather than being driven to action by the Yeltsin state, the Cossacks, driven by their perceived role as protectors of “Russianness,” took action against those they deemed threats to Russia. Their actions flamed tensions in the early 1990s, oftentimes against the wishes of the Yeltsin government. Though the Cossacks promoted the Russian interest, such action was also a way to empower the Cossack identity through combat, giving individual Cossacks a change of obtaining glory and honor in battle as a Cossack,

The Cossacks were perceived as capable of both buttressing and undermining the state. As one military observer of the time, General Vladimir Dudnik, noted in 1993 about a lack of manpower in the North Caucasus Military District: “The


\textsuperscript{80} Vladimir Gromov, conversation with author, 1 July. 2013.
Cossacks are a component part of Russia’s spiritual rebirth. Whose arsenal they are taken into is important. If it is the government’s arsenal, then the Cossacks will be the government’s ally. If it’s the opposition’s, then the Cossacks will be a source of new discord.”

Even as Dudnik worried about the loyalties of certain Cossack groups, he made it clear that the Cossack Revival aspires to fulfill a grander purpose than cullying political power. His emphasis on "spiritual rebirth" imbues the Kuban Cossacks with a greater importance than was historically-based, as though the Cossack was important in the Imperial system, it was the protector of Orthodox spirituality and not its creator.

**Cossacks on the National Stage**

As the larger Russian population attempted to interpret the revival of Cossackdom and delineate whether the movement was a true historical reenactment or a modern reimagining, the Cossacks attempted to recreate old Cossack political structures at the regional level and new pan-Cossack organizations that imagined a total integration of Cossack traditions and values into a single cohesive policy platform. One of these pan-Cossack organizations was the Moscow-based Cossack Alliance, whose legislative branch, the Council of Atamans, included the atamans of all the reformed Cossacks hosts in the Russian Federation. The founding congress in 1990 included 260 delegates from hosts across Russia, with the Kuban Cossacks

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81 American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, *The Current Digest*, no. 14, 18.
consisting of the second largest delegation after the Don Cossacks. They unveiled a political platform that they expected all Cossack hosts to agree on and support as a unified policy. Among other demands the list included:

1. Abandoning the stereotypical, generated by Trotskyism and Neo-Trotskyism, views of the Cossacks as a reactionary force; officially admitting the criminal politics of genocide against the Cossacks.
2. Accepting the Cossacks as a unique ethnos that has the same rights for national self-expression as any other nation.
3. Creating Cossack delegations within higher bodies of state authority of the Soviet Union, Soviet Republics and autonomous republics of which different Cossack communities are parts of.
4. Creating a state commission (committee) for the Cossack revival. Developing a special government program for the Cossack revival.
5. Restoring the Cossack self-government and economic independence of the Cossack territories. Taking official action on combining administrative-territorial and ethnic borders in the Cossack historical areas. Establishing a special mode of land utilization on the traditional basis.
6. State tax exemption for Cossacks until 1995, including land taxes. These funds will be used for the economic and cultural revival of the Cossacks and for preparing young men for military service.
7. Reinstatement of the Cossack military formations within the Armed Forces and border troops.
8. Bringing back home the Cossacks scattered all over our country and the world.

These demands were not a return of the Imperial system—as Orlov, the human rights activist, feared—but a reimagined, modernized conception of the Cossacks as an “ethnos.” Cossacks imagined themselves as an ethnic community like the Tatars or Yakuts and claimed the political and social rights granted to those minority ethnic groups. The document attempts to define Cossack identity as both part of and distinct from Russian identity: “We are talked about a lot but not known well. The Cossacks have always been the guards of the Russian borders, the keepers of our land. We

developed as a part of the Russian nation, but with our own unique culture, way of life, and households. The Cossacks accepted very different peoples into its family. In our fate, the history of Russia and the whole country was reflected.”\textsuperscript{84} However, there is ambiguity whether Cossacks, while claiming to be a distinct ethnos, accepted or integrated other populations, including Russians, into their ranks. In the post-Soviet period, while many proudly proclaimed and identified with their Cossack heritage, the eighty years of turbulence and fracturing of Cossack communities meant that many Cossacks held duplicitous identities as Russians or Soviets before returning to their Cossack identity. In order to bridge these identities, the common thread of Orthodoxy is used to unite Russian and Cossack through both ethnos and shared values.

We are for the freedom of conscience and religion; we are for returning all the temples and monasteries to the religious communities, for the revival of holidays and rituals, for creating Sunday religious schools...It is necessary to recreate the Cossack spiritual values in stanitsas and farmsteads, to rebuild the churches in all their beauty. To raise the children in the good Cossack traditions: of respect for the elders, love for one’s homeland, work, moral purity of family, loyal service and serving your country. To revive the singing traditions of the Cossacks that capture the military history, morals and life of the Cossacks, the traditional Cossack clothes, crafts, and trades.\textsuperscript{85}

Finally, the document goes on to connect the spiritual values that make up the core of the Cossack identity into corporeal matters. The reenactment of Cossack life is seen in demands five and six, which seek to tie Cossackdom with land, particularly the communal stanitsa. This underscored the dependence of the revival of Cossack identity on rural agrarian connections. The Cossacks saw land revival as a partial regaining of what was lost in the Revolution, as all Cossack lands were taken by the

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
state and Cossack *stanitsa* were broken and redistributed as Soviet collective farms (*kolkhoz*). “In the socio-economic sphere, the Cossack Alliance focuses on the traditional way of life and the total freedom of business patterns which will allow to satisfy as much as possible the material and spiritual needs of each person…The profit from the business the Cossack Alliance will use towards the development of the social sphere, and the restoration of cultural and historical Cossack monuments.”

The broad ambitions of the Cossack alliance largely failed as policy goals, particularly with regard to economics, in part because they were at odds with the Yeltsin’s liberalization and economic “shock therapy” in the early 1990s. Moreover, internal dissent between the central organization and individual Cossack hosts saw Cossack lobbying by hosts on a regional, rather than a federal, level. One Cossack observer in 1995 noted in an English forward to a Russian-language book about the Cossack revival that, “This public movement had a positive side…Then the Cossackdom, as other public movements, happened to be specially split according to the model of political parties.”

Kuban Cossack leadership shared this sentiment. In interviews with the author, Gromov complained that the Union of Cossacks was too political and centralized in Moscow while the Kuban Cossacks were apolitical in nature and in better touch with their region.

A Kuban Cossack, by the standards of the Kuban Cossack Army, should be loyal to their Cossack identity and their host, and be the apolitical representatives and protectors of Russian traditional values and Orthodoxy—a standard that proves paradoxical in practice. Though thoroughly enmeshed in regional politics, the unified

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86 Ibid.
87 Tkachenko, *Gde Spit*, 279.
88 Vladimir Gromov, conversation with author, 27 June 2013.
image of the Cossack host is tarnished by stated political intent. The appearance of the Kuban Cossack as above petty politics and united as a single entity is an act intended to glorify the Kuban Cossacks’ position within the region. This image of the factionless Cossack protecting his country then forms part of the role-play of Cossack identity: a figure claiming apolitical intents but deeply engaged in local political affairs and more broadly supporting traditional and conservative Russian parties. Inherent in the apolitical acting of the Kuban Cossacks is a discomfort with democratic politics and a rejection of western democracy as “un-Cossack” because it divides the Russian people, the narod, into weak factions. Though the Cossacks are quick to point out the “democratic” nature of the Zaporozhian and Don Sich, Kuban Cossacks do not trust the contemporary iteration of democracy and therefore present themselves as above it.  

The Kuban Cossacks and Political Games

As the Cossack Alliance envisioned Cossackdom as a unified front, the Kuban Cossacks envisioned similar but localized goals specific to the region. As is evident in an interview between Vladimir Gromov and a rather sympathetic reporter from the Kuban News, a Krasnodar based newspaper, in 1993, the shifting landscape of the Kuban Cossacks’ revival and their then-recent consolidation in the Kuban Cossack Army shows how individuals host realized the broad and generalized concepts of the Cossack Alliance. Gromov starts by listing his achievements:

89 Pavel Frolov, conversation with author, 18 June 2013.
We have accomplished a lot. First, the Kuban Cossack Rada was created (now it is the Kuban Cossack Host), the old framework of the Kuban Cossacks is recreated—the stanitsa, farmstead, and town organizations. In other words, the Cossacks are united in their historical land. The All-Kuban Cossack Host now consists of the Cossacks who live in Krasnodar Region, in Adygeya Republic, that is the Maikop branch, and the Cossacks of the Balashinsky branch of Karachay-Cherkessia. 90

This choice to include Kuban Cossacks from other regions appeared to be a controversial issue as some Kuban Cossacks claimed that the name of All-Kuban Cossacks was ahistorical and therefore unfaithful to the enactment of the Kuban Cossack Host. But it iterates the relationship between role-play and the revival. Gromov contends in the interview that, “We have, in fact, already answered this question. The administrative-territorial division has changed, and the former, pre-revolution Kuban region does not exist anymore, it has been significantly cut. But it does not at all mean that we have a right to refuse the Cossacks who live in the “lost” areas.” 91 Gromov, however, claimed his changes to the organization brought it to a more complete representation of the Kuban Cossacks. The realities of eighty years of change meant that the organization now included individuals who did not fit the contemporary geographic parameters but identified themselves as Kuban Cossacks. The parallels between historical reenactment and the Revival are again seen in this dispute. Much like the historical reenactor prides himself on being historically accurate in all aspects, the Kuban Cossacks found total historical accuracy critical to the Revival, to the point of serious debate over something as seemingly unimportant as titles and names at the expense of larger cultural, economic, and political issues.

90 Pyotr Pirdius, “Proshu k Kazachestvu Otnositsya Serezno [I ask that Cossacks be taken seriously],” Kubanskie Novosti, 16 Nov. 1994, 3.
91 Ibid.
The most revealing areas of the interview with Gromov deal with the practical matters relating to the recreation of Kuban Cossack military and political status. As previously discussed, non-Cossack observers imagined the larger Cossack revival to be a return of Cossack forces and patriotism to the armed forces of Russia. As a tool, they could be used for or against the state, but the armed forces of the Russian Federation hoped to draw on them as a new sort of *esprit de corps* that might fill the vacuum left by the loss of Soviet ideology that served as a basis for the Soviet military. As Gromov states when asked about the involvement of the Cossacks with the Russian military: “Yes, on our insistence was issued a directive of the General Staff about creating Cossack units throughout our region, and now we are forming outposts along the Black Sea Coast from Anapa to Adler. Also, two Cossack airborne regiments are being formed as well.”92 The Kuban Cossack integration into the military proved to be a complicated process as Cossack paramilitaries were numerous; the Cossacks’ interface with the military was complicated, and while Cossack brigades were organized within the Russian military under Yeltsin, the Kuban Cossacks were involved in adventurism abroad.93

As the Cossacks sought to reenact their role on a national and regional scale, individual actors with the Kuban Cossacks sought to rekindle the image of the Kuban Cossack as fighting warriors by joining and actively fighting in armed conflicts in the recently-formed post-Soviet republics surrounding Russia. From 1992 to 1993, the Kuban Cossacks were engaged both in conflicts in Transnistria, a breakaway province of Moldova, and closer to home, across the Georgian border from the Krasnodar Krai,
in Abkhazia. Though not officially endorsed by any formal Kuban Cossack organization or the Russian Federation, individual Kuban Cossacks volunteered to join in combat against elements and factions perceived as Russia’s foes. For Kuban Cossacks born after World War II, such conflicts were an opportunity to express their Cossack identity through combat: the militant role-play of dress uniforms and marches coming to fruition in actual combat on a foreign field.

Gromov’s sentiments showcase the transition of the Revival into military activity. In 1993 when this interview was conducted, individual Kuban Cossacks were in the midst of fighting in Abkhazia and had recently been involved in the conflict in Transnistria in 1992. In both cases, the Kuban Cossacks were fighting in support of break-away ethnic states from larger, non-Russian nations: a Russian minority in Transnistria against Moldova and an Abkhaz minority in Abkhazia against Georgia. The support of Abkhazia was framed in a historical context, with Gromov claiming that Abkhazia helped the Kuban during the catastrophic famine in the early 1930s, so Kuban Cossack support in their war was reciprocal. Kuban Cossacks motivation to volunteer to fight in such conflicts stems both from a desire to help Russian-friendly ethnic minorities that appeared oppressed by their new nations (with the status of the Cossack “ethnos” as a minority in the Russian Federation in mind) and to fulfill the warrior aspect of the Cossack identity. In effect, this would allow them to cease “playing Cossack” and become the ideal Cossack conceptualized by the Revival. Certainly Kuban Cossack volunteers fulfilled Russian interests in helping pro-Russian breakaway states, and though the Kuban Cossacks were forbidden to send fighters to Abkhazia, Gromov and other Kuban Cossack leaders

94 Vladimir Gromov, conversation with author, 27 June 2013.
largely looked the other way at volunteer groups forming and leaving for conflict zones. The bonds between the Kuban Cossacks and the Abkhazians were such that the Abkhazians formed their own Cossack organization to form bilateral Cossack relationships between the two. The institutionalized structures of Cossack political organization—the host, the Rada, and the Ataman—facilitated common ground between the two and also served as a way for Abkhazians to attract their own highly militarized, motivated paramilitary force to deploy during their conflict with Georgia. The death of men fighting in these conflicts provided opportunity for the Kuban Cossacks to engage in forms of highly choreographed recreations of funeral traditions and mourning. Though the Cossacks fighting in these conflicts wore no costume into battle, the Kuban Cossack community celebrated their “spirit” and “valor” and gave them full funerals with all members in uniform, including leaders of various Kuban Cossack hosts, dignifying these men as important heroes in the Revival, though they fought far from the Kuban.

The Army then shapes its policy based on the perception of the ideal Cossack, which in turn shapes the question and thus perception of how a Kuban Cossack should act. When the journalist talks about matters of the economic viability of the Kuban Cossacks and the possibility that they may become dependent on the state he says: “Let me be honest, when the Cossacks ask the government for money I feel uncomfortable. A Cossack begging with his hand outstretched is not a real Cossack, or at least so my parents used to say.” Gromov is then forced to defend his

95 Ibid.
96 Burmagin, Ot Kubanskogo Kazachego, 206.
97 Pirdius, “Proshhu”. 

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organization and the viability of the Kuban Cossack, accepting the terms of the journalist’s perception stating:

Well, I agree with you. And trust me, we do not ignore financial problems. Thus, the Kuban Cossack Bank was created and I must say that it ranks high among other banks. The Host has its own stables with 40 horses in stanitsa Kholmskaya, a market is being built in the Komsomolsky micro-district… The old mill on Severnaya Street was passed on to us; it had been abandoned for a long time. We are planning to open there an administrative-hotel complex (the building is historical).98

The economic situation for the Kuban Cossacks would be the most ambitious yet least successful part of their changes to the region. Though Gromov lists a set of achievements, even the most ambitious of reforms, the reorganization and reformation of stanitsa into Kuban Cossack collectives, had failed by 1993. Though they were organized, the Cossacks had little financial means to purchase large areas of land and the liberalization of markets in Russia meant that the previously tight regulations and protections on agricultural markets were open to foreign competition. Individual stranitas were unable to compete with foreign exports, particularly from Turkey and Europe, and much of the productive agricultural land in the Kuban was bought up by agribusinesses in the 2000s. This is an especially frustrating fact for the Cossacks, who took pride in the image of the Kuban as a Russian breadbasket, and it has exacerbated xenophobia, as the Cossacks blame foreigners for damaging Russian wellbeing.99

Cossacks also took issue with allowing their political and ethnological capital to be determined by any outside force. Gromov’s indictment of the Yeltsin’s draft law

98 Ibid.
99 Konstantin Yakovlevich, conversation with author, 18 June 2013, Vladimir Gromov, conversation with author, 1 July 2013.
“On the Restoration of Cossacks,” which sought to legally designate Cossack hosts, dominates the final section of the interview:

Just think about it. Under this law, for example, any Russian citizen can become a Cossack (like a union of sorts); the Cossack uniform might be worn only by the Cossacks serving in Cossack units; the Cossacks can participate in the political race… I have a feeling that it was prepared not only by non-Cossacks, but also by non-Christians. Because the main idea of this draft seems to be, “You people work, and we will govern you.”

The Kuban Cossacks may see themselves as protectors of the Russian state, but Gromov reflects a desire for independence from the Russian state in matters of deciding what comprises Cossack identity and what a Cossack can do. The definitions of the Cossack in draft bill removed some of the Cossack hosts’ power to decide how to determine Cossack identity and who should wear the uniform and how they should wear it. Later versions of Russian Federation bills on Cossackdom would concede that power to the Cossack host, making them the legally recognized arbiters of Cossack identity and membership. Again Cossackdom and (Orthodox) Christianity are connected. Both traits are lacking in the imagined assailants to Cossack identity. Gromov implies that no Orthodox Christian, even a non-Cossack, would support such a bill, since Cossack identity and the Orthodox faith are so intertwined that to be an enemy of the Cossacks is to be an enemy of Orthodoxy and by a larger extension, traditional Russian values.

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100 Pirdius, “Proshu”.
The Kuban Cossack Choir: A Traditional Form of Role-play

The Kuban Cossack Choir is the most widely known expression of Kuban Cossack identity. The Choir, formed in 1811, survived through the Soviet period, and is seen as the bridge between the Imperial era and the present that allowed Kuban Cossack identity to survive despite the violence of the Soviet era.

This bridge became an important element after the triumph of the Bolsheviks disrupted Cossack political, social, and economic structures. Decossackization, and collectivization had a devastating impact on the Cossack population in the region. These two policies ended any sort of formal Kuban Cossack society or political structure, leaving the keepers of cultural heritage and historical memory dead or exiled. No institution of Kuban Cossack knowledge remained and the surviving members of the Kuban Cossacks lacked organizations to share and express their cultural identity. Only in the post-World War II period did the Cossacks receive a substantive venue again to perform their identity in the Kuban Cossack Choir.

As in the rest of the Soviet Union, the post-Stalin period brought more stability and lessened repression of Kuban Cossack identity and social or political activity. Indeed, the opening of the Kuban Cossack Choir as a cultural outlet in 1968 helped to ensure that Kuban Cossack identity was not completely destroyed in the Soviet period. However, through the choir, the Soviet apparatus controlled the expression of Kuban Cossack identity culture, and separated it from any political or social message. Kuban Cossack identity, like many of the titular ethnic identities of the Soviet Union, was boiled down to a presentable form of song and dance, without social and political content. As was the case with other groups in the Soviet Union—
whether ethnic, religious, or social—identities and narratives were carefully controlled and only allowed to be presented to larger Soviet society on the terms of and through the Soviet apparatus.

This “folklorization” by the Soviet cultural apparatus left the Kuban Cossacks with no political expression and a carefully demarcated cultural role. The Choir was not intended to be a replacement for the multitude of smaller, stranitsa folk ensembles that stopped in the Civil War, but rather was a selection of the most generic and unthreatening of Kuban Cossack folk performance that could be distilled and shown off to the rest of the Soviet Union and the world. That being said, the Choir had state funding and employed 157 folk singers and dozens of support staff that were participating in folk culture; the global performances of the Choir meant that even in the late Soviet era, the Cossack was known to global audiences.102

The existence of the Kuban Cossack Choir later provided a focal point from which the Kuban Cossacks could rebuild their identity during the Revival. The significance of the Choir is even reflected in the urban landscape of Krasnodar, as the Kuban Cossack Army headquarters were established next to the eight-story Kuban Cossack Choir headquarters that the regional Soviet authorities had constructed. Though the spaces and structures were reestablished in the late Soviet period, the Kuban Cossack Choir became the repository of Cossack identity and the rallying point for the Kuban Cossack Revival, in part because it had been the only major, well-funded Kuban Cossack organization in Krasnodar Krai.

Although there was less state repression in the late Soviet period compared to the violence of the Civil War and Stalin era, the onset of Glasnost and perestroika in

the 1980s brought Kuban Cossacks the opportunity to take control of Cossack identity from the Soviet ideological apparatus and to use Soviet institutions to empower their own social and political movements. The Choir’s supposed apolitical nature gave way as the Choir’s leadership—particularly its director Viktor Zakharchenko, who was appointed in 1974—served as mediators and guides in the Kuban Cossack Revival. Zakharchenko helped organize the 1990 and 1992 Kuban Cossack Rada meetings of all Kuban Cossack Revival groups, often taking the floor during disputes between factions to push the agenda forward, even though Zakharchenko chose not to take leadership of the Kuban Cossack Army, preferring his role as director of the Choir.

The Kuban Cossack Choir, though designed to be apolitical by Soviet authority, thus carried the seeds of political identity expression through Kuban Cossack culture with its performance taking a new meaning in the post-Soviet period, as apolitical “folklore” became a substantive expression of identity in the context of the Revival. The Choir served to guide the Revival, not only serving as moderators for the Rada, but also keeping the Revival contextualized and documented. The Kuban Cossack Choir runs the archives from which the material this thesis is drawn. Though part of a building that serves as the Choir’s bus depot, the small achieve contains all the literature published by the Revival as well as all newspaper and media reports relating to the Revival. Just as the Choir served to bridge the Imperial and post-Soviet by preserving Cossack folk culture under the control of the state, the Choir intends to preserve the historical record of the Revival in all its forms for future generations of Cossacks.

103 Ibid.
Conclusion

A recreation of Kuban Cossack life extends beyond marching in choreographed parades, singing in folk choirs or wearing the Kuban Cossack uniform. As expressed in this chapter, reenactment is exactly that: an attempted recreation of Kuban Cossack life, from costume and manner to the reformation of Kuban Cossack stanitsa economic system and even to a reestablishment of the Kuban Cossacks as a quasi-military force. Since the start of the Revival, the forms of reenactment expressed in substantive policy and action shifted as institutions progressed from the adventurism of the Abkhaz War to formulating grand plans for the economic redevelopment of Cossack stanitsas in the 1990s, to the structured system of weekly parades and Cossack-government partnership.
Conclusion

An Addendum from 2014

The Kuban Cossack Revival is not over. Though its rebirth began more than twenty years ago, the Cossacks do not cease talking of their rebirth, treating it as if it is still an ongoing process. They speak of the process in terms of generations, not years. The goals of the Revival, however, have transformed from bringing about the rebirth of the Cossack to facilitating the rebirth of Russia with the Cossacks as an established part of post-Soviet society. As shown throughout this thesis, the Revival has been as much about engaging with non-Cossack identity as it has been about the Cossacks themselves. With their historical narrative redefined and their identity fixed, the Cossacks again see themselves as the defenders of Russia. Now, however, it is with both the sword and the book.

When I asked Vladimir Gromov about the top priority of the Kuban Cossacks, he said: “Education. Education is the most important role of the Kuban Cossack Army.” In Krasnodar Krai, the Cossacks have taken it upon themselves to “save” new generations of Russian youth from external threats—and Western liberalism and non-Russian immigrants in particular—and to educate them to become like good Cossacks: Orthodox, militaristic, and nationalistic. This vision has found support all the way up the state, and in 2002, President Vladimir Putin awarded Gromov the Order of Friendship, a medal typically given to distinguished foreigners involved in working with Russia or Russians engaged in cross-cultural or cross-national activities.

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105 Vladimir Gromov, conversation with author, 1 July 2013.
for the benefit of Russia.\textsuperscript{106} To the Russian state at least, value of the Kuban Cossack Revival cultural and international activity is enough to warrant its leader a major national award.

As I wrote this thesis, the Kuban Cossacks Revival came to international attention for the first time as Cossack paramilitary forces patrolled the Sochi Winter Olympics in February 2014. Serving as extra security for the games, and conspicuously visible in partial uniform, they became a news story in and of themselves. The Cossacks, however, did not define themselves as a spectacle, but rather as security forces protecting the games. Valery Yefremov, a deputy of the Kuban Cossacks, defended their role to journalists by clarifying that the Cossack presence as the games was not role-play: “We are an actual force, in 2005, a law signed by the President gave us official status so that we can serve in the region. We are not volunteers or hobbyists.”\textsuperscript{107} He references a 2005 Federal Law on the State Service of the Russian Cossacks and, by broad extension, the Federal Russian government as a source of legitimacy for the modern Kuban Cossacks’ activities. Though the Cossacks formulated their own legitimacy in the Revival, creating their own historical and ethnic narratives to justify their movement, the formal connection between Cossack and State—with the Cossacks serving the state—is a different sort of legitimacy, a sort similar to their role as paramilitary police within the Imperial system, a position derived from their service to a powerful, authoritarian state. To western eyes, the paramilitary policing of the Cossacks was unusual, even if it was


legal—a curious clash between the event's projection of a modern, forward-looking
Russia, and a group most in the West assumed to be nonexistent since the Revolution.

This clash only grew more defined, and more focused on, after the Cossacks
beat the anti-Putin protest band Pussy Riot during its performance at Sochi. It is clear
that those assaulting Pussy Riot were Kuban Cossacks, as their red-topped *papakha*
and pink sleeve badges with the emblem of the Kuban Cossacks leave little doubt to
their host. Though a stunning act of brutality, the beating did fulfill of the goals of the
Revival: It was a demonstration of Cossack power, a blatant act of public violence
with few repercussions, and an actualized form of historical reenactment.

Pussy Riot, formed in the summer of 2011, is feminist, pro-LGBT rights and
anti-Putin using their music to condemn Putin’s Russia and their impromptu concerts
as demonstration. Their most notable protest performance was inside Moscow’s
Cathedral of Christ the Savior in February 2012, which made worldwide headlines
after three members of the band were arrested and sentenced to jail terms soon after.
Pussy Riot is an almost perfect antithesis to the Revival and a strikingly radical
representation of the threat from which the Cossacks claim to protect new generations.

In context of the Revival and Cossack history, the beating is an almost perfect
case of history repeating itself, with the Cossacks engaging in the same activity they
had a hundred years prior. The band’s performance was radical dissent against the
Russian state and Orthodox Church, while the Kuban Cossack paramilitary, much
like their Imperial era predecessors, protected the state and Orthodox values from
disruption by literally beating the opposition into submission. The recreation of an
Imperial repression of dissidents was a reproduction even down to the method, as the
Cossacks assaulted Pussy Riot using a *Nagyka*, a thick horse whip that Cossacks used to put down protests and strikes in the late Imperial Era. While the *shashka*, a type of sabre, is the melee weapon of choice for the Kuban Cossacks to display in their formal military attire, the *nagyka* replaces the baton as the weapon of choice in policing and disciplining the enemies of the state. The *nagyka* in the hands of the paramilitary Cossack police, created by a regional government incorporating and formalizing the Paramilitarism developed by the Kuban Cossack revival, to beat dissidents of the Russian state created a sort of boundary break between acting and reality. Reality shaped the role-play as role-play altered reality, and the assault on Pussy Riot was a perverse performance as the Kuban Cossacks paramilitary, much like the Imperial era Cossacks, suppressed dissent that was viewed as threatening to “traditional” Orthodox Russia.

The sudden appearance of the Kuban Cossack Revival in the West did not stop with Sochi. Just three days after the closing ceremonies of the Sochi Olympic, Russian forces seized control of the Crimea in Ukraine after the Ukrainian Revolution overthrew the pro-Putin Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych. Kuban Cossack volunteers accompanied official Russian forces to engage in conflicts outside of Russia, ostensibly to protect Russian interests and ethnic Russians abroad. The volunteers, numbering at least 150 men, set up checkpoints across the Crimea.108 Just like in Abkhazia and Transnistria, the Cossacks were willing to go anywhere to serve the motherland. As one leader in Crimea put it, “Cossacks have no borders.”109

However, unlike in Abkhazia and Transnistria, where the Cossacks entered first and

109 Ibid.
stayed longest, the Russian government took the lead and the Cossacks followed the state into action. Putin has, for the moment at least, embraced the idea that Russia has a right to defend Russians or allied peoples like the Abkhaz or Ossetians, regardless of the sovereign rights of other nations, under the pretext of defending ethnic Russians in those nations. Putin seems to have embraced Cossack values like militarism, Orthodoxy, and nationalism, as those most beneficial to buttressing state ideology and ensuring his continued presidency. In this strategy to win support, Putin seems to have taken a note from the Cossacks, and the Cossacks, always willing to demonstrate their identity in conflict, joined in Crimea once things got underway.

Though the Kuban Cossacks prefer to define themselves as separate from yet supportive of the state, it appears that, for the time being, Putin’s grand strategy provides the Cossacks with a stage to express their identity to a global audience. Indeed, there has never been a better time to be a Cossack, as the Revival’s promise of restoring Cossacks to their glorious, if drastically reimagined, past has culminated in the state’s embrace, and even the President’s aping, of the constructed identity as defenders of traditional Russia. Cossacks now possess state support that allows them to demonstrate their martial power not only to their country or region, but to the world.
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