

## **Re-enacting “Cossack roots”: Embodiment of memory, history and tradition among young people in southern Russia**

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### Selected recent publications:

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Popov Anton and Deák, Dušan. 2015. “Making Sense of the ‘Difficult’ Past: Transmission of Political Heritage and Memory-work among Young People across Europe.”

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## **Re-enacting “Cossack roots”: Embodiment of memory, history and tradition among young people in southern Russia**

This article draws upon ethnographic research which was conducted among young Cossacks (members of officially registered and informal Cossack clubs) in southern Russia. It presents young people’s participation in the Cossack “nativism” as a physical and material mode of socialisation into the mnemonic community. The research puts forward an argument that such corporal and sensorial experiences is effective in recruiting some young members to the Cossack movement. At the same time, the performative character of Neo-Cossack identity destabilises contemporary Cossacks’ claims of authenticity related to the status of the legitimate heirs of historical Cossackdom. At the more general level of discussion this paper juxtaposes bodily activities, social memory, and revivalist discourses.

Keywords: Cossacks, social memory, embodiment, southern Russia, young people

### **Introduction**

... It is like a key, certain keys are needed, the same is with physical training, [you need it] to feel your internal self, to reach a certain state. In other words, if you give a sword to someone who has Cossack roots, not everyone could even hold it in his hands. Well, I don’t know, this opens up in the course of your life activities, genetic memory resurfaces. There is such concept as “genetic memory”... (Daniil, born 1984)<sup>1</sup>

This extract from an interview with a young Cossack officer highlights the role history and memory play in the construction of contemporary Cossackdom’s meanings in southern Russia. Thus, reflecting on the “traditional martial art techniques,” Daniil, a member of the officially registered (*reestrovoe*) and state-sponsored Kuban Cossack Host (*Kubanskoe Kazach’e Voisko*, or hereafter *KKV*) captured in a very concise form the link between historical memory and body as a foundation for contemporary Cossack identity. The concept of “genetic memory” is

suggested by Daniil as the one which brings together the ethnicist vision of Cossackdom as a “heredity” or “Cossack roots” (*kazach’i korni*) and its performative manifestation through enactment of the skills which are associated with the Cossack ancestors.

In his highly acclaimed book about ethnonationalism in the former Soviet Union Valerii Tishkov (1997) recalls his conversation with a high-ranked bureaucrat of the first Yeltsin government about the nature of Cossack identity.<sup>2</sup> Then, in 1992, Tishkov dismissed Cossack claims to being a distinct ethnic entity (a nation or *ethnos*, in accordance with Soviet ethnological nomenclature) on the ground that Cossackdom (*kazachestvo*) was not even “a social stratum but a mobilised memory about a past social stratum” (21). He writes that “this mobilisation pursues certain goals, mainly on the part of a limited number of activists” (21). Since this conversation took place the debate about Cossack identity in the post-Soviet space has developed along the line of ethnicity negotiating the question of whether the contemporary Cossacks are an ethnic group or a social/professional/political movement or organisation (Appleby 2010; Arnold 2014; Boeck 2004; Holquist 2009; Markedonov 2004). Nonetheless, Tishkov’s view of memory as one of the central pillars of the Cossack identity construction seems to be essential for understanding the Cossack revival, which has also been defined by some observers as the Neo-Cossack movement (Derluguian and Cipko 1997; Markedonov 2003). As Toje (2006) argues, contemporary Cossack identities are constructed through practices of remembering (and forgetting) the past and (re)interpreting the Cossack history (or histories).

The history, traditions and memories of the past are important issues for those who support the Cossacks’ claim of ethnicity. Ideologists and academic proponents of Cossack ethno-cultural revival tend to concentrate on historical and ethnographic

evidences of Cossack particularity, specifying them as a distinct (sub-)ethnic group historically rooted in, or even indigenous to, the so-called Cossack regions (*Prisud*) mainly in the southern frontier zones of the former Russian Empire (Almazov, Novikov and Manzhola 1999; Matveev 2000; Nikitin 2007). Their opponents, on the other hand, criticise a contemporary Cossack revival for its exclusivist ideology which contains extreme xenophobia and nationalism. Human rights activists routinely list different Cossack “hosts” and “unions” among radical nationalist organisations (Verkhovskii, Mikhailova and Pribylovskii 1999, 18–49). The same concern is also expressed by anthropologists who are especially worried about violence against ethnic minorities perpetrated by Cossack organisations in southern Russia (Osipov and Cherepova 1996; Osipov 1999; Verkhovskii, Mikhailova and Pribylovskii 1999, 54). The anthropologists focus on political agendas of the revivalist movement, its paramilitary and criminal activities in the zones of so-called “ethnic conflicts.”

However, both sides of the academic debate on the Cossack movement and Cossack identity pay relatively little attention to the meaning of Cossackdom to the ordinary people (both the rank and file of the Cossack organisations and those who identify themselves as Cossacks but do not take active part in the revival).<sup>3</sup> Even less has been written about young people who are involved in the Cossack revivalist activities. With very few exceptions (see, for example, Matveev 2000), even proponents of Cossack revival have ignored Cossack youth in their research, although young people are pointed out as a target group in the Cossack revivalist programmes.

This article is an attempt to address this issue and bring young people who take part in the Cossack revival in the centre of academic investigation. However, rather than focusing on the construction of identity or political agendas of this movement, the paper presents young people’s participation in Cossack “nativism” as a

physical and material way of socialisation into the mnemonic community. The research puts forward an argument that such corporal and sensorial experiences is effective in recruiting young members to the Cossack movement. At the same time, these embodied experiences manifest the performative character of Cossack identity, which in its turn, destabilises contemporary Cossacks' claims of authenticity related to the status of the legitimate heirs of historical Cossackdom. At the more general level of discussion the paper juxtaposes bodily activities, social memory, and revivalist discourses. This demonstrates how the practices of remembering and forgetting the past are becoming the points of reference for production of social, cultural and ethnic identities in the present.

### **The intimate ethnography of Neo-Cossack memory-work**

The article draws predominantly upon ethnographic research which was conducted among young Cossacks (members of officially registered and informal Cossack clubs) in Krasnodar Krai and Rostov Oblast' of the Russian Federation in 2007 and 2008. These two regions have had a strong association with the two most numerous historical Cossack hosts – the Kuban and Don Hosts respectively – which existed as quasi-autonomous administrative and military formations on the southern borderlands of the Russian Empire from the 18<sup>th</sup> century until their abolishment by the Bolsheviks after the Civil War in 1920.

The Bolshevik persecutions and repressions against the Cossack population which in their majority supported the Whites and actively fought against the Revolutionary Red Army during the Civil War made any substantial claims for Cossack identity as a foundation for an ethno-territorial autonomy as part of the early Soviet policy of *korenisatsiya* (Slezkine 1992) unthinkable. In the late 1930s the

Soviet state, however, through its military, economic and cultural policy sponsored the creation of the so-called “Soviet Cossackdom” in southern Russia which in turn facilitated the production of the regional identities which accommodate the memories of the Cossack presence on these territories in the past (Skorik 2008, 207). After WWII the Cossack ‘traditions’ and history were mainly manifested through performances of professional and amateur folklore ensembles and in Soviet feature films<sup>4</sup> which suggested the association of the Cossack past with the entire region and its population. As a result the public representations of the Soviet Cossackdom rendered personal or family “hereditary” connection with the historical Cossacks no longer compulsory. For example, the singers and dancers in the State Kuban Cossack Choir, internationally famous during the late Soviet period, often had no Cossack extraction at all. These public representations of the Cossacks during the Soviet period helped to maintain private memory of the Cossack past in some families of Cossack descendants in the region (Toje 2006). Nevertheless, neglecting, if not forgetting, of their “Cossack roots” seemed to be inevitable for many second and third generation Soviet citizens, not only because it was dangerous to remember (perhaps less so in the late Soviet period when the older Cossack generation was still around) but also due to the absence of any practical meaning to being a Cossack in the Soviet Union in the 1950s-80s. The majority of the Cossack descendants had blended into the region’s Russian majority. Thus, according to some estimates, by the 1990s between one third and about one fifth of the five million strong population of Krasnodar Krai considered themselves Cossack descendants (Boeck 1998, 644), but only a small minority of them (perhaps no more than a few thousand) have taken part in the Neo-Cossack revival (Tutsenko 2001). At the same time, as interviews with some of my informants suggest (see an excerpt from the interview with Natasha (born

1985), cited in this article) the private memories of Cossack ancestry and/or membership in KKV do not necessarily lead to self-identification with Cossacks as an ethnic or ‘nationality’ category. Moreover, some observers even note that according to two last census the number of residents of Krasnodar Kray self-identifying as “Russian, including Cossack” has decreased from 17,500 (0.3 per cent of the region’s population) in 2002 to 5,300 (0.1 per cent) in 2010 (Arnold 2014, 483).

The Neo-Cossack movement had emerged in these territories at the pick of perestroika in the late Soviet period. The movement had developed from small informal clubs of history enthusiasts and professional historians who were interested in Cossack history and folklore (Skinner 1994, 1019). Thus from the very beginning the movement has been involved in, and to some extent initiated, the revisiting of Cossack history – in particular the imperial period when the Cossack communities had enjoyed a status of a “privileged estate” (*privilegirovannoe soslovie*) granted to them in exchange for their military service to Tsars, the Cossacks’ participation in the Civil War, and their experiences of repressions in the earlier years of Soviet Rule (Boeck 1998).

In Krasnodar Krai, one of the oldest such groups was the Krasnodar Cossack Club. In 1990, this club became a founder of the NGO “*Kubanskaya Kazach’ya Rada*” (Kuban Cossack Council) which received full support from regional and federal authorities and eventually monopolised the Neo-Cossack revivalist movement in the region, pushing out to the margins its rivals in competition for access to the financial and administrative resources provided by the state (Popov and Kuznetsov 2008, 240). Since 1998 this organisation under its current name of the Kuban Cossack Host (KKV) has become listed in the State Register of the Cossack organisations that provides the legal frame for its special relations with the Russian state, resulting in its

members forming voluntary and semi-professional police support units (*druzhiny*), acting as forest rangers, serving on the contractual basis as border-guards, etc. At the same time the Neo-Cossack revivalist ideology with its emphasis of Cossack cultural, if not ethnic, particularism has been used by the Krasnodar Krai administration to support its controversial and populist policy towards ethnic minorities, migrants and land-use in the region. For example, since September 2012, the streets of the region's towns and villages are patrolled by police together with Cossack *druzhiny* on the payroll of the regional administration. In August 2012, Alexander Tkachev, then a Krasnodar Krai governor, in his speech at a Ministry of Internal Affairs, explained that the main purpose of these Cossack patrols is to battle against migration from the Caucasus and Central Asia by demonstrating that “there are Kubanians here, they have their own laws, and they are rather tough guys” (cited from Kostiukova and Ivanov 2012). To a great extent the Neo-Cossack nativist claims have informed the regionalist ideology and an officially sponsored construction of regional identity of the Russian majority as a “native population” of the historically Cossack territory (242). For example the flag and the anthem of the Kuban Cossack Republic that existed in the region during the Civil War (1918–1920) have been adopted as the official flag and anthem of Krasnodar Krai.

This entanglement of the Cossackdom revival with the emerging “citizenship regimes” (Humphrey 1999) in Post-Soviet southern Russia sets a context within which the members of the Neo-Cossack organisations and Cossack descendants who are not involved in the movement are making sense of their Cossack identity. This process can be defined as “memory-work” (Hamilakis and Labanyi 2008, 12) since, as this article argues, the meanings of the present day Cossack identities are produced through conscious and embodied engagement with the past in the course of which

family memories are mobilised, the mainstream historiography is challenged and alternative history and “traditions” are imagined.

The memory work of young people (aged 15-30) who are involved in the Neo-Cossack movement is the main focus of this article. The main fieldwork sites were in Krasnodar, a capital city of the region, and Sochi, a city on the region’s Black Sea coast. Several informants were members of the Krasnodar-based *Kuren*’ organisation (a small unit in the KKV).<sup>5</sup> In the course of the research the initial focus on “registered” (official) Cossack organisations was extended to include members of an informal history re-enactment club called *Bunchuk*. Two rural settlements, Severskaya and Fedulov in Krasnodar and Rostov regions respectively, were also visited in the course of conducting the research. Different Cossack and historical re-enactment events and festivals were attended in Krasnodar Krai (in Gelendzhik and Taman) and neighbouring Rostov Oblast’ (in Azov).

Finally, to a great extent the research process, from design and negotiating access to analysis and writing up, has been influenced by my family background and personal experience of the Cossack revival. Krasnodar Krai is my native region. From early childhood in the 1970s–80s I was told the family history by my maternal grandfather who was a Don Cossack. Later, in 1989, my grandparents came out with their experience of deportation in Siberia and the story of my two great-grandfathers who died in GULAG. This part of my family history had not been told before and my parents learned it at the same time as I did. Perhaps because of this socialisation in memories of Cossackdom, I joined one of the first Neo-Cossack clubs in Krasnodar for a brief period of several months at the age of 15. Being disappointed with both the activities and ideas of the movement I left the club, but continued to pursue my interest in (family) history which eventually inspired me to choose the professional

career of a social researcher. So my interpretation of informants' engagement with memories of the Cossack past has been intertwined with the on-going reflection on my own involvement in the movement and an effect which family memories have had on my identity. Moreover, several members of my extended family eventually became my informants. All these factors gave me an advantage in relating to the stories and experiences of my informants at the personal and intimate level but also added complex ethical and methodological issues to what has become "intimate ethnography" (the term which Waterston and Rylko-Bauer (2006) coined to describe their experience of doing research with family members). Such research practice has required me to pay attention to my own social positioning as well as that of my informants in order to counteract an excessive subjectivity which might otherwise result from my emotional engagement with the project's subject matter and participants (Gray 2003, 22).

### **Embodied and "Second-hand" Social Memory**

Historical revisionism has played a key role in developing the Cossack ethnicist and nativist ideology. One can agree with Tishkov that mobilisation of historical memory by Neo-Cossacks is an essential element of this process. However, unlike Tishkov, I do not dismiss memory as an insufficient ground for the construction of viable ethnic identities, even if it is mobilised by a relatively small and fairly marginal group in such a way that it contradicts the dominant during the Soviet period interpretation of Cossackdom as a "historical anachronism" rooted in the pre-modern estate (*soslovie*) of the Russian Empire (Koo 2012, 12; Appleby 2010, 849).

Anthropologists have long been paying significant attention to conflicting memories, regarding them as the sites where the politics of identity comes into play (Pine, Kaneff and Haukanes 2004, 4). What members of a particular society remember is the product of the relationship between politics, as a realm of power, and the social construction of meanings of the past. This relationship Boyarin (1994) calls the “politics of memory.” Drawing on Halbwachs’ conception of “collective memory,” he argues that “identity and memory are virtually the same” since both are the product and manifestation of power relations within the society (23). Memories are intersubjective and symbolic since they are selected in order to constitute group membership and individual identity and are constantly reshaped, reinvented and reinforced as “members contest and create the boundaries and links among themselves” (26). Therefore, collective memory has to be understood as a process of representation and active construction of the past by the members of a given group.

Social memory as one of the key aspects of collective identity is transmitted and acquires its embodiment through performative acts such as commemorative rituals and other culturally significant repetitive practices (e.g. dancing, singing, dress-codes, etc.) (Connerton 1989; Wulff 2005). Connerton emphasises that performances are important in conveying and sustaining memories because “practices and behaviour are constantly being assimilated to a cognitive model” (1989, 104). This suggests that the body is understood as an important medium in the process of remembering, re-enacting and re-interpreting meanings of the past and present identities.

The focus on body as a medium for social memories brings to attention the importance of senses in the acquisition, production, and transmission of memories. The event is remembered not only cognitively but also experienced in a sensory way

by witnesses. This implies an involvement with the event in number of sensorial ways – through watching, hearing, smelling, touching and tasting but also, importantly, by developing an emotional response to it. However, these sensorial experiences and their affects constitute and shape individual memory by being attached to the meanings of the past. These meanings are generated by and within the socio-cultural context which makes possible interpretations of the past in a certain way. Reassessing Durkheim's point about embodied and collectively shared affect of ritual performance, Narvaez insists on the existence of dynamic relationships between sensorial experience and cognition as "social construction of affect and affective construction of social meaning" (2006, 57). Thus Cappelletto (2003, 242) points out the complex relationships between our sensorial memory (or "implicit emotional memory") and "semantic memory" which is a more rationally organised description of the past that is historically and culturally developed in the course of interaction between social actors.

When memories of a past event are passed to those who have not had first-hand experience of it, the past is experienced by "non-witnesses" as a story, often with some sensorial prompts (whether it is an object, place, photograph, music, etc). For instance, Hirsch (1999) talks about "postmemory" as how the children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma relate to the experience of their parents, which they "remember," however, only as stories that they have been told (as quoted in Pine, Kaneff and Haukanes 2004, 16).<sup>6</sup> Thus it is possible to speak about "second-hand memory" as an intersubjective process of socialisation into the mnemonic community which is experienced in a sensory way through interaction with other human subjects, as well as material objects which act as cues for remembering and re-imagining the past.<sup>7</sup>

## **The Cossack revival as an embodied identity?**

In its most simplified form the debate about the nature of the historical and contemporary (Neo-)Cossack identity can be reduced to the question of whether one should be *born as* or can *become* a Cossack. Whether the Cossackdom is a people (*narod*) or an “estate” (*soslovie*) was the question which I was often asked during my fieldwork by both Cossacks and “ordinary citizens” (sometimes this question was asked as a test of my expertise in this contested issue). As Toje argues, throughout their history Cossacks “had a remarkable ability to include new members in their group” as does any frontier community (2006, 1073).<sup>8</sup> And some leaders of contemporary Cossacks would welcome in their organisation any male candidate who does not necessarily have a Cossack ancestry but meets other required criteria – being Slavic, or at least orthodox, and having a Cossack “state of mind” (Manuylov 2007 and Skinner 1994, as quoted in Toje 2006, 1073–1074). The opponents of such a vision of the Cossack identity insist that Cossacks are a distinct ethnic group (or sub-ethnic group of Russians) and that is why only a person who was born in the Cossack family or has “Cossack roots” might be considered to be a Cossack. In fact, Cossack ethno-nationalism in the Kuban region might be traced back to the early twentieth century, when, as Koo (2012) convincingly argues, the Kuban Cossacks started claiming national identity for themselves as a reaction to the crisis of Imperial estate (*soslovie*) system. Thus, paradoxically, the Kuban Cossack ethno-nationalism as a modern phenomenon has universalised estate particularism.

Although within the KKV there are supporters of both parties, it seems that the host’s leadership is in favour of a more ethnicist interpretation of Cossack identity (Gromov 2002a, 3 and 2002b, 8, see also Boeck 1998, 645). However, the KKV has an official status as a non-governmental organisation.<sup>9</sup> Potentially membership in the

registered Cossack organisation is open to any citizen of the Russian Federation. For example, Dmitrii (born 1982), who was a youth leader (*zamestitel' atamana po rabote s molodezh'iu*) in the *Kuren'* pointed out that his organisation enlisted any person who wished to be a Cossack although the preferred candidates were those who had Slavic ethnic origin but even those of “a mixed race” (*metisy*) are accepted. In fact Dmitrii himself turned out to be half-Ossetian (Krasnodar fieldwork, March 2007). Although among my informants there was a number of people who defined their ethnicity in terms of a mixed ethnic origin (e.g. an Armenian-Russian and Russian-Moldovan) absolute majority of young members of the *Kuren'* would not think twice to identify their ‘nationality’ as Russians. Some of them, however, had Ukrainian surnames since historically the Northern and Western parts of the Kuban territory, the so-called *Chernomoriya* (the territory of the Black Sea host) was colonised initially by Cossacks and later by non-Cossack population who originated from Ukraine. The historians and ethnographers of the Kuban Cossack Host emphasise that the Kuban Cossacks emerged as an amalgamation of descendants of two oldest Cossack communities – the Russian-speaking Don Cossacks and the Ukrainian-speaking Zporozhian and Ekaterinoslav Cossacks (see Bondar' 2003, 241-2; Burmagin 2009, 239; Ratushniak 2011, 189). The dialect of Ukrainian was spoken by many Kuban Cossacks in the past and is still spoken by some of their descendants living in the rural districts of Krasnodar Krai. Thus, the Ukrainian language and history of Zaporozhskaya Sich are cherished by members of the informal history re-enactment Cossack club *Bunchuk* due to their overtly ethnicist interpretation of Cossacks' cultural and military history, as a people (*narod*) who is ethnically different from the Russians; hence several of club's activists took language classes at the Krasnodar Ukrainian Cultural Association and travelled to Ukraine to participate at the

Ukrainian Cossack history re-enactment festivals in 2006, 2007 and 2008. The former leadership of KKV and ataman Gromov personally also promoted idea of cultural affinity of Kuban Cossacks with Ukraine by developing formal and informal links with the Ukrainian Cossack organisations (for example, the official delegation of the Zaporizhsko Cossack Host from Eastern Ukraine was present in September 2007 in Taman, Krasnodar Krai, at the celebration of the 215<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cossacks' settlement in the region). However, these cultural and historical links to Ukraine do not translate either in the national identification among the majority of ordinary Kubanians, whose ancestors perhaps resettled to the region from Ukraine, or in the KKV's identity politics. Moreover, memories of the non-Russian origin of some Kuban Cossacks are marginalised in the KKV leadership's emphasis on history of Cossacks' service to the Russian state. This confirms Appleby's observation that with appointment of the new atman of KKV, Nikolai Doluda, the tendency of "prioritizing state service and the maintenance of law and order over cultural renewal" became particularly explicit resulting in further increase in the number of members who joined the Host being motivated by Russian patriotic feeling and / or pragmatism of service opportunities rather than by ideas of Cossack cultural renaissance and family memories (2010, 861).

The *Kuren'* itself had been founded in the late 1990s in order to attract young people in the Cossack movement which after its heyday in the earlier 1990s then experienced a problem of depopulation. The leadership of the *Kuren'* has defined the military training and preparation of young conscripts to the army service as their main objectives and area of activities. The organisation is located in the "working class" neighbourhood of Krasnodar and members have been recruited from among the male students of local secondary schools and vocational colleges who are indeed potential

army and navy conscripts (by contrast, the more culture-orientated and informal *Bunchuk* has among its activist young people from economically affluent families and several university students who have more chances to avoid conscription to military service or to serve as army officers after completion their university course). In fact, many of my informants see their participation in the activities of the *Kuren'* as a resource which they hope to utilise as social capital at the time of their conscription. Although some Cossack organisations have informal agreements with regionally-based military unites where they might try to direct their young members, they cannot give any guarantee that a young soldier would not end up in a remote Siberian garrison. Nevertheless, young people, like Sergei (born 1985) who reflected on his army experience in the interview, find military training provided by Cossacks free of charge very valuable:

... I was studying in the vocational school when a head of staff from our *Kuren'* came and asked whether we wanted to join Cossackdom. There were sport training sessions free of charge and other such things. And I came there, [because I have] Cossack roots – my grandfather and great-grandfather were Cossacks. I went to army, served for two years in the internal forces (police forces staffed by conscript soldiers – *The author*). Of course [it helped me a lot] that we had military training before army – we learned military drill and had tactics classes which were not bad. It helped latter in army...

It seems that this pragmatism, rather than Cossack origin, has motivated many of the young people from the *Kuren'* to join the Cossack movement. The understanding of Cossackdom as an opportunity to act and achieve higher social status has been clearly articulated by several of my informants. They rarely speak about Cossackdom as something which they were born in, although some of them would define it in very strong ethnicist terms as a distinct people. However they all refer to their activities as Cossacks, in terms of something that they *do*. Young people usually speak about their

relationship with the movement in terms of action: “go to Cossackdom” (*khozhu v kazachestvo*) and “do Cossackdom” (*zanimaemsia kazachestvom*) or “acting in Cossackdom” (*zanimaemsia v kazachestve*).

In fact, some informants “discovered” their Cossack roots only after joining “registered” Cossack organisations or taking part in the activities organised by Cossacks (e.g. festivals). Moreover, some of them have not got any Cossack extraction at all. And it is not surprising that the ethnic connotation of Cossack identity is quite alien even for those among my informants who might be considered “hereditary” Cossacks. For instance, Ivan (born 1987) was hesitant when replying to the question of whether Cossacks are a distinct group from Russians, in the end concluding that Cossacks are Russians but a separate people (*narod*) as well (Krasnodar fieldwork, September 2007).

The following extract from the interview with, Natasha (born 1985), a daughter of a leader of a small Krasnodar Cossack organisation, demonstrates how important action and achievement are, especially in the professional military sphere, for young people’s interpretations of Cossack identity:

As far as I know, the Cossack, it was a military status (*voinskoe zvanie*). Here again, if people deserved this status, it meant they achieved something. Some sort of respect (*pochest'*) has to be. It should not to be, it *is* somehow. I think that if your relatives achieve something [they] are called Cossacks, if you don't defame this name, this title; then you can consider yourself [a Cossack]. This is my opinion... But they [Cossacks] are not ethnicity in any case. It could not be considered as ethnicity at all, because it was first of all a status. How could it be a nation (*natsiya*)? These were people who achieved something special in their life.

In Natasha’s narrative the ethnicist understanding of “Cossack roots” is rejected. However the ideas of tradition and genealogy are vividly present in the suggestion that one can be considered to be a Cossack if he/she acts according to high standards

set by ancestors. The action here is seen as a way of remembering and, therefore, reproducing tradition and identity. Natasha's father, Stepanych (born 1956), elaborated and explained contradictory relations between "to be born in" and "to become" a Cossack:

As a matter of fact, the Cossack tradition says that it is not enough to be born a Cossack someone needs to become and be one. Therefore blood ties are very important but not essential. I know very well many hereditary Cossacks (*rodovye kazaki*) for whom Cossackdom is a picture on the wall and nothing more. Nothing, traditions, are not interesting for them. At the same time, I know many who haven't got any [Cossack] roots but they melted into [the movement].

Stepanych used the metaphor of a picture on the wall as a visual prompt for remembering one's Cossack origin ("roots") but this memory, in his opinion, is a passive one which does nothing for the revival of traditions. In this context, revival means the re-enacting of tradition. As Connerton (1989, 72) points out, the past is remembered in words and images but it is transmitted through bodily behaviour and re-enactment of the past.

Some of my informants, like a history re-enactment enthusiast from Sochi known by his nickname "Komandor" (born 1984), maintain that Cossack genealogy can be acquired through generations of acting as Cossacks:

There is a lot of confusion with [what is] a Cossack hereditary, because there could be hereditary Cossacks, those who traced their kin from the [*Zaporozhskaya*] *Sech*. But there could also be conscripted (*poverstannye*) (sic.) Cossacks. These were people who went to the *stanitsa* (the Cossack settlement – *The author*) and said that they want to be Cossacks. In other words he was settled there on the outskirts [of the *stanitsa*] but consequently, since he had taken part in the raid where he proved himself, he would be made a Cossack. Well not he but, let's say his children, in other words, sometime later he became a Cossack. There were such cases as well.

Young people I interviewed seem to be in full agreement with the idea that one becomes Cossack by acting as a Cossack, including such bodily activities as martial arts, military training or mastering the Cossack skills of horse riding and sword fencing. Even when young people talk about their Cossack “heredity” they are not taking their Cossack identity for granted but rather insisting on *doing* it. Through their military and sporting activities in the Cossack organisations, they are enacting their Cossack roots, even though their motivations for joining the movement are often dictated by pragmatism and strategically calculated.

### **“Forgotten Cossack roots”**

Body and bodily actions have been seen by some observers as an important medium through which collective memory is enacted by individuals as part of the group identification (Connerton 1989; Narvaez 2004; Wulff 2005). The embodiment of traditions, or “Cossack roots,” is how my informants make sense of their involvement in the movement and indeed fit together pragmatism and ethnonationalism of their Cossack identities. For example, in his story of motivations for joining the Cossackdom Oleg (born 1988) bring together his family memory about the Cossack origin and personal interest in bodily practices offered by the *Kuren*’ in order to justify and explain his Cossack activities:

...Why else I have come there [the Cossackdom]. My grandfather is a Cossack. When I was younger he wanted to send me in the [newly opened Cossack] Cadet Corpus. [He was saying that I am] a Cossack, Cossack. Well then I enlisted to the Cossackdom... Since I went to the Cossackdom my grandfather has been very happy, he is asking all the time what is going on there in the Cossackdom. Well, in general, there are a lot of pluses in the Cossackdom: there are a lot of sport trainings (*seksi*) everyone can find something which suites him. Then you can travel around to visit different places – take part in the Cossack celebrations. Well,

many of us are doing parachute jumping or different other sports (*seksii*) or gym and so on.

Sometimes the memory of their Cossack origin is reduced to the image (an actual photograph) which depicts stereotypical Cossack bodily activities. Thus for Ivan (born 1987, Krasnodar) the only, but for him sufficient, evidence of his Cossack roots is the photo of his maternal grandfather on horseback. Sergei (born 1985, Krasnodar) though did not refer to any physical picture in the interview, was explaining his interest in historical fencing, which he practices in one of the Krasnodar Cossack clubs, as a memory about his great-grandfather who was a Cossack and skilful swordsman:

My great-grandfather... this is why I started to do fencing – he turned out to be a very skilful with the sword. I even found proof of this. They lived then in the *stanitsa* of Medvedovskaya, I asked relatives there, [they told that] he apparently was very good at sword fencing. Therefore I decide to do [fencing].

Diasio maintains that family resemblance, bodily techniques and individual skills which passed within a family are very effective sensorial and corporal clues that social actors use to “remember, repeat, and ‘invent’ the past” in the everyday practice of making sense of selves and others (2013, 399). The memory and body as a foundation for Cossack identity, which is manifested first of all through performance of bodily activities, are clearly stated by Daniil (born 1984) in the formula of “genetic memory.” Here performance and heredity do not contradict each other as foundations for Cossack identity but rather contribute and depend on each other. Thus Cossackdom is seen as a sort of destiny which is encrypted in the “genes” and manifested/revealed through actions. Stepanych even goes as far as to consider that despite the obvious pragmatism underlying their motivations for joining the official Cossackdom, the majority of young people in these organisations in fact have

“Cossack roots” even if that is “forgotten in their families” (Krasnodar fieldwork, August 2007). In such accounts Cossack identity is a very private and intimate as well as public one since it has to be re-enacted, embodied and in this way (re-)discovered and revived.

The emphasis on (re-)discovery and revival of traditions is not accidental here. Stepanych’s point about “forgotten Cossack roots” has to be taken seriously. The individual bodily skills mentioned above are different from what Mauss called “techniques of body” or the actions which “are more or less habitual and more or less ancient in the life of the individual and the history of the society” ([1935] 1973, 85). They are not strictly speaking “habit-memory” (using Connerton’s terms). These bodily skills are learned and acquired consciously in order to manifest the particular vision of the past critical for construction of the group identity. Thus, ironically, in their politics of memory Neo-Cossacks find the dynamic moment for their identity construction in forgetting rather than remembering.

Learning bodily skills which are discursively linked to ancestral traditions (sometimes through semi-forgotten family histories as in Sergei’s case) is an effective and, crucially, affective mode of socialization into the Neo-Cossack mnemonic community. Being enacted as a “tradition” these bodily skills constitute young people’s “second-hand memory” about the Cossack past, which they can experience and imagine in the present. Importantly, it is the “forgetting” of traditions which makes possible this memory and, indeed, the Neo-Cossack revival itself.

### **“Docile” Cossack bodies?**

The Cossack revivalist project is an instance of the “politics of memory” (Boyarin 1994), since it constructs the Neo-Cossack identity through re-construction of a

particular vision of the past. This past is the Imperial one, and the historical Cossackdom is remembered and re-presented by emphasising, if not exaggerating, their militarism, religiosity and patriotism. At the same time, the very idea of “revival” assumes that something essential for their distinctive identity as a cultural, or even ethnic, group in the past was lost and needs to be revived. In order to perform traditions through which the Neo-Cossack identity is manifested one has to (re-)train his/her body in order to develop the necessary skills.

The Cossack body is (re-)produced through performance of “military traditions.” The development of Cossack body comes through training which suggest (self-)discipline. Thus, in accordance with Foucault’s idea about the role of discipline in the formation of docile bodies “that learn to be more capable, but in fact are subordinated” (as quoted in Wulff 2005, 50), the Cossack embodiment of military traditions can be interpreted as process of docilisation.

Indeed, for my informants the Cossack body is a particular type of body that is male and capable of executing heavy and dangerous tasks. Semen (born 1987), for example, explains the lack of interest towards the Cossack revival on the part of females (female members are virtually absent in the *Kuren*’ and a minority among history re-enactment enthusiasts) by the fact that they are not interested in, and incapable of, the martial arts training offered by the *Kuren*’. Interestingly Olya (born 1982), a wife of a leader of the *Bunchuk* history re-enactment club, put bodily incompetence as a reason for her non-Cossack identification:

Interviewer: Well, do you consider yourself a Cossack woman [*kazachka*]?

Olya: I don’t know whether I am or am not one. To be honest, not. You see, I cannot, I haven’t got such a voice to sing their songs. I cannot dance like them with such footwork. Well I just cannot do this right despite trying many times. No, anyway, I do not consider myself a Cossack woman – I just don’t fit in.

Interviewer: Is it necessary to sing and dance.

Olya: Well [even if] not necessary. You see, I cannot wear their outfits [either]. I feel myself extremely uncomfortable in them...

The fact that Olya mentioned singing as a particular Cossack activity is not accidental. As some commentators maintain, the folkloristic representation of Cossackdom dominated during the Soviet period. As a result Cossack songs (and dance) became almost the only means to officially manifest Cossack identity in the USSR (Olson 2004; Toje 2006; Appleby 2010). Therefore Cossack singing is seen as a bodily expression of a particular spirituality which is hidden inside the person and which one has to release. This bodily link of Cossack singing with internal spiritual power was expressed by one of the participants at the Azov history re-enactment festival when he tried to teach his friends how to sing:<sup>10</sup>

He insisted that everyone can sing. One just had to find a right note inside his body which could be achieved by a training exercise called *raspevka* which started with singing the lowest note somehow from inside diaphragm. And he sang this note moving his hands up along his chest. (Azov diary, August 2007)

Young Cossacks are seen as the embodiment of Cossack militarism and masculinity by themselves and by others. My informants seem to be attracted to the Cossack clubs (both official and informal history reconstruction groups) because they are looking for a form of performativity which leads to the development of a “capable male body.” At the same time, their very involvement in the Cossack revival demands from them the development of “Cossack bodily skills.”

### **Uniformed performances and politics of representation**

Apart from the military and sport training which Cossack organisations offered to their young members free of charge, the youth from the *Kuren'* and other similar

clubs take part in street patrols near churches during Orthodox Christian celebrations (Christmas and Easter) and attend commemoration ceremonies held in places of historical significance for the Kuban Cossacks. Both church patrols and visits to commemoration sites can be interpreted as public statements of the Cossack identity and history in the region. During these events all members of the organisation should be dressed in their Cossack uniform which makes them highly visible and distinct from the general public.

This uniform varies. Sometimes it is a replica of a “traditional” pre-revolutionary Cossack costume – the most distinctive features of which are a Caucasian coat (*cherkeska*) and fur hat (*papakha*). However, in the case of the *Kuren*’ it was a contemporary Russian army camouflage uniform (*kamufliazh*) with the KKV chevrons.

The wearing of Cossack uniform can be seen as part of the production of “docile bodies” since it is an act of discipline which shapes the body visually and imposes a particular way of action, interaction and perception of self and others. Wearing Cossack uniform (whether a *kamufliazh* or “traditional” one) was compulsory for all members of Cossack organisations attending the celebration of the 215<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cossack landing in Taman which was held in the contemporary town of Taman, Krasnodar Krai, in September 2007. The *Kuren*’ was camping in military style on the edge of the big field where an equestrian performance – one of the central events of this – celebration took place. In the campsite, uniformed activities made military discipline part of Cossack identity. For example, the *Kuren*’s members were ordered to patrol the perimeter of the field during the night. They were given army helmets and armour waistcoats as well as deactivated replicas of *kalashnikovs*. They carried out this duty willingly and were even envied by young

members of other organisations camping with them. However, the legitimacy of their Cossack status was questioned by others when they became drunk while on patrol duty – despite the declaration of strict discipline, heavy drinking was the main social activity at the event.

Such uniformed performance as a statement of the Cossack identity is something which is not entirely new and had its origin in the past and “tradition.” In Imperial Russia only members of the Cossack estate had the right to wear such elements of Cossack uniform as trousers with colour strips (*sharavary s lampasami*) or Circassian coats (*cherceski*) (Holquist 2009).

The old photographs of men wearing Cossack uniform are perhaps the most visible and powerful prompts of collective memory about the historical Cossackdom. As in my family such images are kept privately by many Cossack descendants. However, old photographs of uniformed Cossacks have also entered the public domain through being uploaded on websites of Cossack and historical re-enactment organisations. The discussion forums dedicated to these photographs are very popular and full of comments referring to nostalgic, heroic or traumatic memories of Cossack families which are often extrapolated to the destiny of the entire “Cossack people.”<sup>11</sup> As Sarkisova and Shevchenko (2011) point out, photographs often trigger individual practices of remembering and re-inventing the past which are conditioned by such factors as generational differences, for instance, and therefore can provide insights into dynamics of collective remembering. Thus family photos enable younger viewers “to construct their own meanings, authenticating today’s interpretations with the tangible indexical ‘evidences’” while they are projecting and fantasising about the past and future (99–100). Old photographs seem to become a firm reference point for Neo-Cossacks’ way of imagining and visualising the past and projecting the future of

the Cossack revival along the line of militarism and masculine performativity.

Thus in his interview, a *Kuren*' member, Ivan (born 1987) linked the uniform wearing practice with the individualised process of becoming a Cossack. For him an entitlement to wear more traditional elements of the Cossack uniform is enjoyed only by those who have proved themselves as "real" Cossacks by moving up the ranks within the organisation:

Interviewer: Have you got a uniform?

Ivan: Yes, we have a camouflage one now... But I haven't got a full suit yet

Interviewer: Well, it is a *kamufliazh* not a [traditional] pretty one, isn't it?

Ivan: No, to wear [the traditional one] you have to have a high rank, you understand. I am a simple private – we have an order of ranks like in army. Since I am a private I haven't got a right to wear anything else except for *kamufliazh*...

The uniformed performance is also an act of embodiment of a particular vision of history. The embodied representation of history is an act of politics of representation. The Cossack past as a significant reference point for the present Cossack identity is emphasised in its uniformed manifestations. Therefore it has become a particularly contested aspect of the Cossack revival.

### **“Masquerading Cossacks”**

Do you know that there is such opinion that those Cossacks, who exist today, are dressed-up ones (*riazhennye*)? For example, in the Vyselkovskii district (Vladimir is originated from this rural district of Krasnodar Krai – *The author*), all Cossacks, who are there, haven't got anything to do with the land. They sold their land. (Fieldwork diary, Krasnodar, 6 September 2007)

This remark by Vladimir (born 1970) cited from my fieldwork diary seems to question the authenticity of Neo-Cossacks' claims to identity. Vladimir identifies himself as a Cossack and, being older than the majority of my informants, he took an

active part in the earlier stage of the movement in the 1990s but later became disillusioned and disappointed with it and its cause. The term “*riazhennye*” used by Vladimir has simultaneously negative and humorous connotations of fallaciousness and masquerade. In the East-Slavic traditions it is applied to elements of carnivalesque behaviour during weddings and some calendar rituals (e.g. Christmas and Epiphany) when gender, class, ethnicity or even animal-human boundaries are transcended and cultural norms are inverted by means of the dress code. In the ritual *riazhennye* are “clowns” who should not be taken seriously. The word “*riazhennye*,” or even more degrading “*klouny*” (clowns), is often used towards contemporary Cossacks by both ordinary people outside the movement, like Vladimir, and rival parties among Neo-Cossacks themselves.

For example, Viktor (born 1977) who is a young head (*ataman*) of a small Cossack organisation in Sochi, identifies himself as a hereditary Cossack and nationalist. Despite being an officer in the KKV he is critical of the movement leaders’ “ethnically blind” approach to recruitment and their vision of “traditions” limited to military training and uniformed marching. Being influenced by his history re-enactment friends (some of whom he persuaded to join the KKV) Viktor particularly despises newly made replicas of “traditional” Cossack uniform, which, according to him are poor imitations which disgrace anyone wearing them. In fact, Viktor and other “nationalists” call “*riazhennye*” those who wear such uniform. For Viktor the lack of authenticity in outfits betrays an indifference to the cause of a movement that is careful in its preservation and revival of “true Cossack traditions”. Viktor is proud that his *cherkeska* is “traditionally” tailored. The irony is, however, that his “traditional *cherkeska*” was made by professional tailors working for a local

theatre – that was the only place where skills and samples for production of Cossack dress were preserved during the Soviet period.

For many Cossack descendants in the region their Cossack identity is indeed inseparable from the family memories of the past which they experience in a sensory manner by looking at old photographs of their ancestors, singing, or rather listening to Cossack songs, retelling their family histories, and preserving the material artefacts inherited from older generations (that might range from Orthodox icons and Caucasian daggers to household tools or old plates). Therefore such Cossack identity is emotionally appealing but firmly associated with the past. In this respect the Cossack uniform is part of the memory of old Cossack communities and an attribute from the past. Therefore for many ordinary people contemporary Cossacks have no right to wear such uniforms. People are especially outraged by the fact that many Neo-Cossacks put Russian pre-revolutionary medals on their uniform. Term “*riazhennye*” above all means that the person does not belong to the group which is represented with the dress he or she wears.

Vladimir’s comment also hints at materialistic motivations of Neo-Cossacks who use the movement in order to gain economic, political or social capital. My informants’ pragmatism in joining the movement and the lack of family memories of the Cossack past discussed above partly confirms his suspicions. Accusing Neo-Cossacks in selling their land, Vladimir implied that they were uprooted from rural communities (*stanitsy*) of the historical Cossakdom that had the privileged rights to the land in the region in the past. This claim to the “ancestral” land constitutes the core of the Cossack nativist ideology (Popov and Kuznetsov 2008, 243). Vladimir was very sceptical about the authenticity of my informants who were mostly young city dwellers. Indeed the Cossack organisations are in general much more active in

urban centres than in rural districts of the region. Hence, ordinary people often make jokes about “asphalt Cossacks” when talking about “un-natural” environment of the Neo-Cossack revival.

Toje, who conducted her ethnography in the rural district of Krasnodar Krai in the early 2000s, interprets the Cossack descendants’ defiance to the Cossack movement in rural settings as the result of a mismatch between the contemporary publicly performed, politically complicit, male-oriented, and militarised representation of Cossack identity with the intimate family memories which emphasise military exploits of the Cossack ancestors equally alongside their hard-work, horticultural and husbandry skills, as well as high praise of family values. Such memories have been often passed to younger generations by older women whereas in the Neo-Cossack revival the female take on the Cossack past is virtually absent (Toje 2006, 1064).

Toje rightly points out that “this ‘fossilisation’ contributes to filling the contemporary Cossack identity with contradictions” (2006, 1067). The emotional attachment to the memories of the past but rejection of their bodily performance in the present and future projection of such performative practices as “revived traditions” is at the core of the predicament faced by Cossack identity today. This condition might be partly explained by what some observers see as sensorial orders of memory that suggest a hierarchy of memories attached to different sensorial experiences which might lead to tensions between historically conditioned interpretation of the past at the level of dominant public discourses and meanings of the past produced as a response to affects registered at other sensorial levels (Diasio 2013). Thus corporal representation of Cossack identity is not rejected entirely by those Cossack descendants who oppose its performative manifestation, rather it might be sensed as a

person's emotional and spiritual core which one is physically "born with." This view was expressed by Aleksei, Viktor's younger brother, when he explained that there is no need for him to join Cossacks because he "was born the one". However, Aleksei envisaged the ultimate proof of his Cossack-ness within the same discursive regime that emphasise embodiment of Cossack identity as hyper-masculine and militarist when he challenged his brother with a phrase "would [trouble] start I might be the first [to volunteer] in trenches" (Sochi diary, April 2007).

Such internalisation of militarist performativity as embodiment of Cossack identity has become instrumental during the current conflict in Eastern Ukraine where some local separatist fighters and Russian volunteers adopt the name and symbolism of Cossacks for their units. Arguably, Cossacks' high visibility in the Donbas conflict is associated with the revival of political orthodoxy due to popular perception of "Cossacks as the last bearers of Russian authentic national traditions and memory" (Laruelle 2016, 63). Although it is probable that some of these separatist Cossack battalions and regiments have been formed by or with the support of official Cossack organisations registered in Russia (see, for example, Koshik, Kirillov and Dergachev 2016), their file and ranks might not be the members of any registered hosts before the conflict. For example, my former informant Alex, joined the separatist militia in the so-called Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) in Eastern Ukraine in 2015. Although Alex defines himself as an 'ethnic Cossack', he has never been a member of any official or informal Cossack organisations. His family history as descendants of Don Cossacks is an important factor for both his personal identification as a Cossack and his decision to go to fight for DNR. In his social media page, Alex posted the photographs of his great-grandfather in the Cossack uniform. His next post provided the old map of the Don Cossack territory where he indicated that before 1920 it

included parts of Eastern Ukraine where the conflict is taking place now. Thus Alex appeals to the family memories and history of Don Cossackdom to justify his own militancy and participation in the current conflict.

### **Concluding discussion**

The practices of remembering (and forgetting) the past and (re)interpreting Cossack history (or histories) are central for the production of new Cossack ethnicity. However, the investigation of young people's practices and narratives demonstrates that the meaning of Cossack identity, as well as its history and traditions, do not go uncontested. Even when young people talk about their Cossack heredity they are not taking their Cossack identity for granted but rather re-interpreting its meanings through their bodily practices.

The ethnographic findings presented in this article demonstrate that an emphasis on the performative aspect of Cossack cultural and ethnic identity provides important insight into young people's motivations in joining the Cossack revivalist movement (both in registered organisations and informal clubs). Embodied memory is manifested through performances whether they are historical commemorative rituals or other bodily practices (Connerton 1989, 35). These performative acts are the mode of socialisation into mnemonic communities when a second-hand memory of the past is acquired through first-hand sensorial (physical and affective) experience of activities, materials, objects and places within which meanings are framed by the group's "semantic memory." Hence history and memory become an embodied experience as young people participate in historical re-enactment festivals, march in their Cossack uniform, or undertake "traditional" military training. At the same time, the very necessity of Neo-Cossack revival is underlined by forgetting those

“traditions” essential for the Cossack identity. Forgetting as an implicit part of mnemonic socialisation in the Neo-Cossack community provides opportunities for re-inventing and re-imagining the past. Forgetting and learning traditions through bodily practices give space for young people’s own interpretations of the past, history and Cossack identity even if they do not remember their Cossack ancestry or have not got one.

However, this highly performative character of the contemporary Cossack revival, which acquire its dynamic moment as much in forgetting as in remembering the past, destabilises the movement’s claims of authenticity. In this respect, and rather ironically, the Neo-Cossacks’ emphasis on embodied memory of the (lost) traditions confirms Butler’s notion of “performative identity” that has been put forward in her works on gay and lesbian identities (Butler 1990). Butler’s “performative” approach to identity suggests that rather than being primordially founded and based on characteristics which are inherited or biologically conditioned and, therefore, stable and unchangeable, identity is manifested through, and indeed exists as, various acts and performative practices. Such interpretation of “performativity” makes redundant any claims of authentic identity since it is an act of imitation of an original which might had never existed or had been lost forever (21). This might provide a valuable insight into the contradiction at the core of nativist and ethnicist ideologies beyond the Neo-Cossack case which also look for authenticity of their identity claims in the past.

According to Connerton (1989), the meanings of embodied memory are socially conditioned because they rest on the conventional expectations of the others’ in order to be interpreted as legitimate or illegitimate. Memories performed through bodily actions are engaged in a power struggle over defining tradition and history but for the particular vision of the group’s future. The Neo-Cossacks’ claims to ethnic

identity are enacted through embodied performances of the past which are hardly reconcilable with the present lives of the majority of Cossack descendants and the society in general. It is also difficult to envisage how the vision of an identity which is firmly associated with the past can be projected into the future. After all, the very necessity of the “revival” implies the “death,” “lost” and disconnection with the past.

Daniil’s statement about Cossack “genetic memory” sounds deceptively primordialistic. Nevertheless, I would argue that the meaning of “heredity” expressed in corporal metaphors of “birth” and “genes” implies that family memories are the only intimate domain where the Cossack identity retains its continuity without being contested as publicly performed representations of the past which could not be easily accommodated in the present. The legitimacy and authenticity of Neo-Cossacks claims are challenged and rejected by many exactly because their highly performative nature does not match these intimate emotions which connect the individual with living memories of their family.

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## **Notes**

1. The informants are referred by the pseudonyms and the year of birth. Extracts from the fieldnotes are referred further in the text of the paper as “Fieldwork diary” with indication of the place and date of the diary entry. In September 2007, Hilary Pilkington (University

- 
- of Warwick) joined me in the field. Several audio interviews were recorded by both researchers jointly or separately.
2. Valery Tishkov, a Soviet and Russian historian and ethnologist, was a Director of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology (IEA) in the Russian Academy of Science from 1989 to 2015. Arguably he has been one of the first social scientists in the late USSR who challenged the essentialist premises of the ‘theory of ethnos’, the conceptual framework that had dominated in the Soviet ethnography and history in the 1970s and 1980s, introducing the constructivist and instrumentalist approaches to ethnicity and national identity (see, for example, Tishkov 1989a, 1989b). Since the directorship of Tishkov, political and economic process that utilised ethnic and cultural differences and sometimes defined as ‘ethnic conflicts’ have become part of research programmes of IEA. In 1992, Tishkov was a head of the Ministry of National Policy.
  3. The noticeable exceptions here are works by Appleby (2010), Arnold (2014), Boeck (1998 and 2004), Holquist (2009) and Toje (2006).
  4. The most famous among Soviet feature films about Cossacks are a collective farm love story, *Kubanskie kazaki* (Mosfilm 1949) directed by Ivan Pyr’ev and a war drama, *Tikhii Don* (Kinostudiya im. M. Gor’kogo 1958) directed by Sergei Gerasimov and based on the novel *And Quiet Flows the Don* (1934) by Mikhail Sholokhov.
  5. *The Kuren*’ is a changed name of the organisation. In fact the term “*kuren*” is used for the basic (smallest in terms of membership) structural unit of the Kuban Cossack Host’s organisations in Krasnodar Krai. Historically, the *kuren*’ was a structural unit of the *Zaporozhskaya Sech*, a Cossack state in the territory of contemporary southern Ukraine existed in the 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Part of the former Zaporozhian Cossacks formed the core of the Cossack population in the Kuban region after resettlement there in 1792.
  6. Anthropologists and sociologists studying Holocaust survivors have written extensively about the effects that memories of survivors have on subsequent generations of their families (see, for example, Starman 2006; Hirsch 1999; Bar-On and Gilad 1994).
  7. Examining the role photographs from family albums play in remembering the “Novocherkassk massacre” against the workers demonstration in the Russian town of Novocherkassk in 1962, Sarkisova and Shevchenko (2011) demonstrate that photographs are not only important prompts for articulating memories of the event across generations but also enable an at least partial reinvention of the past.
  8. For the relationships between the Cossack frontier past and the present ethnicist ideology see, for example, Popov (2012).

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9. Some commentators even identify the Neo-Cossack movement as a particular form of civil society (Tutsenko 2001).
  10. Since 2005 the Azov festival has been organised by history re-enactment clubs some of which have explicit Cossack identity, including the Krasnodar-based club *Bunchuk*.
  11. See for example thematic thread on the forum of the Cossack ethnicist website *Vol'naia stanitsa*, available at: <http://forum.fstanitsa.ru/>, accessed on 6 March 2012.

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