

Liberty University

Imagined Spaces:

Land, Identity, and Kuban' Cossack State-Building in Revolutionary Russia,

1917-1922

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in History

by

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## Abstract

In 1917, the February Revolution ended the Russian Empire and the Kuban' Cossacks' military obligations to the tsarist estate system. Kuban' Cossack ethnic identity existed and evolved within the estate system prior to the 1917 revolutions. When the estate system collapsed, the Cossacks declared their identity as a separate ethnic minority. Backed by the Cossack villages' democratic votes, Kuban' Cossack elites and politicians created the Kuban' People's Republic, an independent anti-Bolshevik state, in the North Caucasus region. Designed to preserve local autonomy, settle disputes over land given to the corporate Cossack body in exchange for military service, and to avoid property confiscation by the Soviets and nonresident Russian settlers who lived among them, Cossack state-building represented both historical Cossack self-rule processes and modern state-building movements. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the Cossacks joined the Autonomous Republic of Mountain Peoples to create a chain of loosely federated states that offered full minority rights and facilitated local self-rule. Kuban' Cossack resistance to Russian authoritarianism created problems between the Cossacks and their anti-Bolshevik allies in the Volunteer White Army. The Cossack separatists' goals for a decentralized local government conflicted with the Whites' attempts to recreate a unified and central Russian state. The Cossack struggle to preserve their identity, land, and autonomy motivated them to launch a liberating war to resist the emerging Soviet state.

## Note on Dates and Transliterations

With few exceptions, an effort has been made to preserve the historical dates in the Russian Old-Style Julian calendar rather than the Gregorian calendar used in the West. The Julian calendar lingered thirteen days behind Europe and the United States in the twentieth century. Entering Russia during this period meant stepping back in time. For example, the October 25th Revolution occurred on November 7 in the West, while Nicholas II abdicated during the February Revolution on March 3, 1917, rather than March 16, by the Old Russian calendar. From 1918-1923, the Bolsheviks replaced the Julian calendar with the Gregorian calendar. In the process of destroying the old world to create a modern proletarian utopia, the Soviets cut thirteen days from the year. Despite these reform efforts, the Orthodox Church and Russian peasants continued to mark holidays, feast days, and their ancestors' agrarian cycle in the old style. The Soviets later alternated between a five and six-day revolutionary calendar and the Gregorian calendar that they considered more civilized than the Julian calendar. Where dates remain unclear by either calendar, the date provided by the original source has been used.

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The transliterations from the Cyrillic to the Roman alphabet adhere to the Library of Congress transliteration system both for prerevolutionary Russian and Soviet sources. In accordance with the Library of Congress system, the palatalized soft sign (Ь) and the hard sign (Ѣ) are indicated by an apostrophe (') and a quotation mark ("), respectively. The long vowel *yat* (ѣ), rendered obsolete under the 1918 Soviet orthographic reforms, and comparable to an æ sound, is represented by an iĕ mark in this work. Several names such as Wrangel, Krasnov, and Bogaevsky have retained the standard transliterated forms recognized in western academia.

## Table of Contents

Signature page	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Abstract	iv
Notes on Dates and Transliterations	v
Table of Contents	vi
<b>Prologue</b>	vii
<b>Chapter I: Identity</b>	8
<b>Chapter II: Land</b>	28
<b>Chapter III: Autonomy</b>	46
<b>Chapter IV: Resistance</b>	80
<b>Bibliography</b>	104

## Prologue

### *The Kuban', North Caucasus: Spring 1920*

The sun felt hot on the Cossacks' necks. Green bloomed over the steppe. Their horses' hooves threw up a scent from the warm earth. Beneath black and white sheepskin hats, the Kuban' Cossacks' faces looked tense and hollow with alert dark eyes. Sunlight glinted on the white shoulder straps on their long gray *cherkesska* uniforms. Today, the war seemed quiet here. They had not seen any Soviet patrols. At home, the Cossacks ploughed in the muddy fields above the Kuban' river. The men relaxed as their horses trotted down the hillside. As they plunged into a gully, a group of men wearing Cossack coats and fur hats moved in beside them.

For moments, the horsemen moved together in easy, synchronized harmony. Then one of the newcomers challenged a Cossack to a race. The men galloped ahead. Suddenly, the soldier turned, slashing the Cossack across the face with his sword. He fell silently. Shouting and waving their sabers, the entire group swung on the Cossacks. Bewildered, the Kuban' men could not understand why other Cossacks would attack them. Bunching together, the Cossacks whirled in gray waves to attack what they now recognized as disguised Bolshevik partisans across the open fields. Galloping, along the horizon, horses' bodies outstretched, riders clinging low over their necks, the Kuban' Cossacks drove the Soviets for a brief time from the Cossack lands.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ivan V. Ovcharenko, *In a Ring of Fire: Memories of a Partisan* (Moscow and Leningrad: Cooperative Pub., Society of Foreign Workers in the USSR, 1933), 87-89; Jacob Marschak, *Recollections of Kiev and the Northern Caucasus, 1917-1918*, University of California, Berkeley, Bancroft Library Oral History Center, oral history transcript, 1968-1971, 26; Alexander Paul Albov, *Recollections of Pre-revolutionary Russia, the Russian Revolution and Civil War, the Balkans in the 1930s and Service in the Vlasov Army in World War II* (Berkeley, California: University of California, Bancroft Regional Oral History Office, 1986), 286, 328.

## Chapter I

### Identity

#### Center and Periphery

When the Tsarist state collapsed in February 1917, the Kuban' Cossacks, a professional military caste and Russian minority group, met in Ekaterinodar, the Cossack capital in the North Caucasus, to discuss their future. They decided that although the class system with its military obligations had disappeared, the Cossack people would always survive. Months later, Cossack politicians declared the Kuban' People's Republic a separate state.<sup>2</sup>

Kuban' Cossack autonomy and resistance to the Russian state did not emerge for the first time in 1917. State-building developed as a modern solution to preserve the Cossacks' existing rights but rose from historic Cossack independence and a prerevolutionary shift towards greater self-rule. During the nineteenth century, the Cossacks expanded on their democratic self-government processes within the estate system called *soslovie*. The estate system's collapse also did not create Cossack ethnic identity. The Cossacks already saw themselves as a separate people group. Tension remained between Cossack regional rule on the empire's borders and central government authority. The revolution stripped away the estate structure restraining Cossack independence and the Kuban' leaders moved into this void to make separatist goals a reality. The Cossack government's resistance to dictatorship, attempts to protect their land and communities, and to develop a Kuban' Army to insulate their borders brought the Cossacks into conflict with their allies in the anti-Bolshevik Volunteer White Army. Committed to monolithic Russian

<sup>2</sup> Olga Andriewsky, "The Triumph of Particularism: The Kuban' Cossacks in 1917," *Journal of Ukrainian Graduate Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 29-30; K. N. Sokolov, *Pravlenie generala Denikina* (Sofia: Rossiško Bulgarian Publishing House, 1921), 7, 33-35; Hege Toje, "Cossack Identity in the New Russia: Kuban' Cossack Revival and Local Politics," *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol 58, no. 7 (November 2006): 1059-1060.



nationalism, the Whites criminalized Cossack separatism as *samostiinost'* or treason. The Cossacks' and their White allies' opposing goals destabilized the anti-Bolshevik movement in South Russia and prevented them from developing a more unified front against the Soviets. Kuban' Cossack ethnic identity and struggle for legitimate self-rule drove them to create a free state that rejected Russian control and resulted in sustained resistance against the Soviet state that extended beyond the boundaries of the Russian Civil War.

Before the revolution, the Cossacks occupied a contradictory and ambiguous space between freedom and submission, warrior and peasant, and democracy and repression. While the Cossacks emerged as a mutable people group in the Ukrainian steppes, they evolved into a distinct ethnicity. The Cossacks, whose ancestors were born free or escaped serfdom, rejected dictatorship in all forms. In the late eighteenth century, the state developed a social estate system. The system sought to organize a multitude of social hierarchies and define class boundaries and mobility. It also established each class's legal duties and privileges. The estate system defined the Cossacks' mandatory service to the state. According to the estate system's requirements, each male Cossack had to perform twenty years of military service. In return, the government gave the Cossacks land, exemption from poll tax, money dues (*obrok*), labor dues (*barshchina*), and the ability to retain local self-rule. For the Cossacks, land ownership represented freedom. Local rule and geographical distance from the center of power secured that freedom. By the late nineteenth century, the Cossacks experienced growing economic stress and tension between their military duties and their communities' needs. Cossack freedoms, although limited by *soslovie*, represented greater autonomy than that offered to other groups in prerevolutionary Russia.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> A. V. Remnev, Mark Von Hagen, and Jane Burbank, *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 353-355; Shane O'Rourke, *The Cossacks* (Manchester University Press, 2008), 67, 70; Robert E. Johnson, "Paradigms, Categories, or Fuzzy Algorithms? Making Sense of *Soslovie* and Class in Russia," *Cahiers du Monde russe*, vol. 51, no. 2/3, Dynamiques sociales et

When tsarist authority collapsed, Cossack-centric politicians and village assemblies that worked to increase Cossack autonomy within the estate system resurfaced to form a concrete political structure. Historic differences and growing tensions between the Cossacks and the *inogorodnye*, the Russian nonresidents in the Kuban' region, strengthened Cossack identity and propelled them along the road towards an ethnic nation. The end of the estate system enabled the Cossacks to discuss their electoral voice, ways to preserve Cossack rights, address land issues, and expand their system of local administration. When the Provisional Government treated Cossack interests with indecision and hostility, the Cossacks turned back to state-building in order to defend their borders and prevent outside interference in their internal affairs as a means to an end. These actions forced the Cossacks into state-building during the Civil War.

By 1917, no conservative, pro-Russian Kuban' Cossack politicians existed and all voted for self-determination, forging a national identity and independent government that created issues for the Kuban' People's Republic. Problems in Cossack self-government emerged when the Volunteer Army criminalized Cossack separatism as treason and the Cossacks resisted attempts to bring them back under a central Russian authority. The Cossack fight for autonomy resulted in resistance to Soviet rule, complex relationships with their neighbors and allies, and

classifications juridiques dans l'Empire russe: Du XVIIe siècle à la révolution de 1917 (Avril-septembre 2010): 463-464; Elise K. Wirtschafter, "Social Categories in Russian Imperial History," *Cahiers du Monde russe*, Écrits personnels, Russie XVIIIe-XXe siècles, vol. 50, no. 1, (Janvier-mars 2009): 231-234; Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Ascribing Class: The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia," *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 65, no. 4 (December 1993): 45; Peter Kenez, *Red Advance, White Defeat* (New Academia Publishing, LLC, 2008), 111-112, 117-120; Smele, 34, 37, 50, 120-121, 123, 125; F. I. Eliseev, *Kazaki na Kavkazskom Fronte, 1914-1917: Zapiski polkovnika Kubanskogo kazach'ego voïska v trinadts'ati Broshiu`rakh-tetradia`kh* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 2001), 36-137; Jonathan D. Smele, *The 'Russian' Civil Wars, 1916-1926: Ten Years That Shook the World* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 33, 48-49; Victor Serge and Susan Weissman, trans., *Russia Twenty Years After* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 168; Brian J. Boeck, *Imperial Boundaries: Cossack Communities and Empire-Building in the Age of Peter the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 233-236; Edward Daniel Clark, *Travels in Russia, Tartary, and Turkey* (Aberdeen: George Clark and Son, 1848), 185, 204; William Sutherland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 57, 75; Shane O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 35-38; Hugo Koehler, and P. J. Capelotti, ed., *Our Man in the Crimea: Commander Hugo Koehler and the Russian Civil War* (University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 140.

polarized the Cossacks between the anti-Bolshevik forces and the emerging Soviet state.

### **Problems and Evolutions in Cossack Ethnic Identity**

The initial problem in interpreting Kuban' Cossack identity remains rooted in their complex ethnic origin. The Cossacks' origins in the untamed borderlands called the "Wild Field" (*dikoye pole*) in modern-day southeastern Ukraine remain unclear. These horsemen, known as "Cossacks," from the Turkic word *kazak* or free man, emerged in the historical record after the Rus' defeated the Mongols. Recent Russian and Ukrainian research indicates that the Cossacks appeared in the same region as the legendary nomadic and Indo-Iranian-speaking Scythian horsemen that populated the Eurasian steppe and then vanished in the third century B. C. E.<sup>4</sup> Early groups may be found by the late Middle Ages as descendants of the Slavs and Turkic steppe peoples like the Cumans and Kipchaks. From these blurred origins, the Cossacks emerged as a Slavic ethnic group that blended Ukrainian and Caucasian genetics. As feudalism declined in Western Europe and Moscow consolidated power in the sixteenth century, serfdom emerged in Muscovite Russia. Serfdom formed the primary relationship between the nobility and peasants. Serfs belonged to the master, bound to land given to the nobility, and had no legal voice. While Russian legal codes did not permit owners to sell peasants as moveable chattel, masters often sold serfs with the land. Men who refused to accept this unfree life escaped to the open steppe besieged by warring nomadic tribes, Turkish *janissaries*, and Crimean Tatars. As Ukrainian peasants fled to the north for safety, roving horsemen, runaway serfs, and migrant soldiers appeared in the demographical void in the Don, Dnieper, and Zaporizhia river regions.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Olena Goncharenko, "Historical and Cultural Origins of the Cossack Folklore of the Dnieper Region," *Periodyk Naukowy Akademii Polonijnej*, vol. 31, no. 6 (2018): 110-113; Jaroslav Stepaniv, "A Turkish Document in Ukrainian from the Mid-Sixteenth Century on the Origin of the Ukrainian Cossacks," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (June 1977): 217-218, 220-224.

<sup>5</sup> Prokin Petrovich Korolenko, *Kubanskije Kazaki: Materia dlya istorii Kubanskago kazach'yago vojska* (Kuban', Russia: Kubanskii Sbornik, 1894), 1-2, 5, 9-10, 41-42; A. I. Denikin, *The Russian Turmoil: Memoirs*

During the sixteenth century, these horsemen with Ukrainian blood formed a warrior brotherhood in the Zaporizhia region. Cossack identity during the early modern period centered on free peasants, soldiers, and freebooters who chose an independent lifestyle in the Wild Field. Men who escaped to join the Cossacks remained free since the Cossacks refused to return them to serfdom. Forming defenses in *sechi*, or stockade forts, the Cossacks created the first democratic military communities in the area. By the early seventeenth century, the Cossacks shifted alliances between Moscow-led Russia, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and the Tatars, aligning with whomever offered more land and autonomy. Dedicated to a free elective process, Cossack leadership shifted between ataman and overlord, and retained this principle as a definitive mark of their identity. Prior to the establishment of certain Cossack military hosts, or *voiskos*, in the early eighteenth century, the Zaporizhian Cossacks possessed a developing ethnic identity. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the Zaporizhian *Sech* and the Cossack Hetmanate government operated as the dominant, semi-autonomous proto-state in the region.<sup>6</sup>

The Cossack struggle for self-government threatened cohesive Russian nationalism and power. Attempts to subdue the Cossacks triggered a wave of rebellions that historians often

*Military, Social, and Political* (London: Hutchinson, 1922), 240; Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 36-44; 245, 256; O'Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 7; Henry A. Landsberger, ed., *Rural Protest: Peasant Movements and Social Change* (London and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1974), 204, 210, 245; Witzernath, 85; Sutherland, *Taming the Wild Steppe*, 201, 211; Lisa Gordon, *Cossack Rebellions: Social Turmoil in the Sixteenth Century Ukraine* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1983), 105, 191; Johann Gottlieb Georgi, "Chernomorskii kazak," The New York Public Library, *Opisanīe vsekh obitaiushchikh v rossīiskom gosudarstve narodov: Ikh zhiteishkikh obriadov, obyknovenīi, odezhd, zhilishch, uprazhnenīi, zabav, vieroispovedanīi i drugikh, dostopamiatnostei*.

<sup>6</sup> Michail Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 122, 224; Gordon, 75, 79; O'Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 37-38; John E. Hodgson, *With Denikin's Armies: Being a Description of the Cossack Counter-Revolution in South Russia, 1918-1920* (London: Temple Bar Publishing, 1932), 124-125; Morgan Philips Price, *My Reminiscences of the Russian Revolution* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1981), 94; Landsberger, 204, 212-213, 215, 221; Sokolov, 2-3, 18; Clark, 185, 204-205; Wilton, 303-306; Durand, 34-36; Gregory P. Tschebotarioff, "The Cossacks and the Revolution of 1917," *The Russian Review*, vol. 20, no. 3 (July 1961): 206; Anatole G. Mazour, *Russia, Past and Present* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1951), 299, 350, 359; George C. Guins, *Impressions of the Russian Imperial Government* (Berkeley: University of California, Bancroft Regional Oral History Office, 1971), 66.

interpreted as peasant wars. Cossack numbers alone could not win against the state. Instead, the Cossacks ignited and led most major peasant uprisings in Russia and Ukraine during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>7</sup> Against a background of popular unrest, Cossack dissidence and freedom stirred peasant admiration, sympathy, and support. Most famously, in 1773, Yemelyan Pugachev's rebellion erupted in part due to the Yaik Cossacks' refusal to obey an imperial order to chase the migrating Kalmyk tribes and force them to return to Russian territory. Pugachev's two-year rebellion unleashed a massive popular revolt. The Cossacks sought to free the serfs and usurp imperial power by declaring Pugachev the true tsar.<sup>8</sup>

In response to uprisings that voiced peasant protest and threatened to destabilize the state, Catherine II broke the backbone of Cossack resistance. Between 1774 and 1792, the state abolished the Cossack Hetmanate and deported around 80,000 Zaporizhian Cossacks that supported Pugachev's rebellion to the Black Sea region in the North Caucasus. Settling in villages or *stanitsas* along the Kuban' River, the Cossacks patrolled the borders between the Caucasian tribes and the Ottoman Empire. As they pushed into the Caucasus Mountains, the Kuban' Cossack military host received fishing rights, tax exemptions, and land tracts. Extending empire into the frontier resulted in violent guerilla warfare between the Cossack and Caucasian communities. Cossack presence also disrupted a flourishing indigenous slave trade to the Ottoman Empire. When Turkish or Circassian slaves and Russian serfs escaped into Kuban' territory, the Cossacks liberated them, hid them, and refused to send them back to their masters.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Landsberger, 204, 212-213, 215-216, 221.

<sup>8</sup> Witzenrath, 139; O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants*, 37; Khodarkovsky, 224; Hodgson, 124-125; Clark, 185, 204; Wilton, 303-305; Mazour, 299, 350, 359; Guins, 66; Price, 94; Sarah Moncada, "Kuban' Cossack Performance and Identity Negotiation in the Russian-Ukrainian Borderlands," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2016, 3-4; Sutherland, *Taming the Wild Field*, 56, 75.

<sup>9</sup> Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845-1917* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 12-13; Kuban' Cossack oral history transcript, schedule A, vol. 26, case no. 511, Slavic Division: Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, 1950, 34-35;

The second problem in establishing Cossack identity lies in their contradictory nature. The Cossacks represented both democratic traditions and the arm of tsarist repression. They included elite and peasant. They both served and resisted the state. They fought indigenous peoples to extend imperial power into the borderlands yet respected and assimilated mountaineer culture into their own traditions. Collectively, they identified as something not quite Russian.<sup>10</sup>

Incorporation into the Russian Army and the formation of large military hosts on the border did not mean integration. While the Kuban' Cossacks adopted Caucasian dress, weapons, and fighting styles, they remained distinct from the indigenous peoples and the Russian settlers that later immigrated to the Kuban'. On the borderlands, the Cossacks remained geographically isolated. This decentralization fostered Cossack identity, culture, and autonomy.<sup>11</sup>

### **A Rigid or Fluid Estate System: Questions in Cossack *Soslovie***

This work endeavors to fill a historiographical gap by interpreting Kuban' Cossack separatism within the premise that Cossack ethnic identity and self-rule existed prior to 1917 and evolved into state-building during the Civil War. For the Cossacks, the estate system evolved as

Brower and Lazzerini, 242; Thomas M. Barrett, "Lines of Uncertainty: The Frontiers of the North Caucasus," *Slavic Review*, vol. 54, no. 3 (Autumn, 1995): 578.

<sup>10</sup> Boris Kamyshansky, *I Am a Cossack* (London: Longmans Green, 1934), 12, 28-29, 33; Jersild, 12-13, 314; Mazour, 158; Marjorie Letherbridge, *The Soul of the Russian* (London: John Lane, 1916), 54-55; Kellogg Durand, *The Red Reign: The True Story of an Adventurous Year in Russia* (New York: Century, 1908), 34-36; Francis McCullagh, *With the Cossacks: Being the Story of an Irishman who Rode with the Cossacks throughout the Russo-Japanese War* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1906), 113-114, 167; A. Markov, *Russkie kadety i iu nker a v mirnoye vremia i na voine* (San Francisco: General Cadet Organization, 1961), 81; Vladimir, S. Littauer, *Russian Hussar: A Story of the Imperial Cavalry, 1911-1920* (Shippensburg: White Mane Publishing, 1993), 11-12; Robert Wilton, *Russia's Agony* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1919), 370; Price, 94.

<sup>11</sup> Eliseev, *Kazaki na Kavkazskom Fronte*, 128, 136, 163; Afrikan P. Bogaeviskii, *Vospominania 1918 goda. Ledyanoi pokhod* (New York: Izdanie Muzeya Belogo Dvizhenia Soyuza Pervopokhodnikov, 1963), 75; Obschestvo revnitelei Kuban'i, ed., *Kuban'skoe Kazachestvo*, *Istoriko Literaturnii i illustrirovannii zhurnal*, no. 13 (1931): 10-11, 20; Pshimaho Kosok, "Revolution and Sovietization in the North Caucasus," *Caucasian Review*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1955): 46; Tschebotarioff, "The Cossacks and the Revolution of 1917," 206; Guins, 66; O' Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 153; McCullagh, 167; Kenez, *Red Attack, White Resistance*, 37-39; Marion Aten and Arthur Ormond, *Last Train over Rostov Bridge* (New York: Julian Messner, 1961), 47; Victor M. Moltchanoff and Boris Raymond, *Victor M. Moltchanoff: The Last White General*, Berkeley, California: University of California, Bancroft Regional Oral History Office, 1972, 16; Clark, 209-210; Durand, 33; Wilton, 101, 307; 37-39; Price, 94.

a negotiation process between local government and the state. The fact that the Cossacks maintained a distinct culture and level of independence prior to the revolution suggests a legally restrictive but practically fluid estate structure. Rigid in obligations and privileges, the *soslovie* enabled the Cossacks to sustain and develop an existing identity within the system.<sup>12</sup>

The modern discourse on Cossack identity and autonomy runs like a thin thread through broader discussions on revolution and definitions of the estate system in late imperial Russia. While excellent coverage exists on the Cossacks in early modern Ukraine, and on the Don, Terek, and Siberian Cossacks, there are few English-language academic articles and currently no full-length academic works on the Kuban' Cossacks. Cossack separatism emerges intermittently in Peter Kenez' *Civil War in South Russia*. The Cossacks' role as a military force gains visibility with Laura Engelstein's *Russia in Flames* chapter on the "War against the Cossacks". Cossack autonomy plays a minor but thematic role in Jonathan D. Smele's *'Russian' Civil Wars*. Philip Longworth's 1970 work, *The Cossacks*, Robert H. McNeal's 1987 study, *Tsar and Cossack*, and Shane O'Rourke's 2008 book, *The Cossacks*, form the trilogy of English-language academic sources on Cossack history. Peter Holquist explored the Don Cossacks' transition from an estate to an ethnos in addition to a crucial study on de-Cossackization in the Don region. Shane O'Rourke contributed a critical study on the Don Cossacks in late imperial Russia and produced the first academic, book-length general history on the Cossack people since *Tsar and Cossack*.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Barbara Skinner, "Identity Formation in the Russian Cossack Revival," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 46, no. 6 (1994): 1017; Koehler, 140; Wilton, 314; Smele, 48-49; Sokolov, 7, 33-35; Serge, *Russia Twenty Years After*, 168.

<sup>13</sup> O' Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants*, 3-10; Thomas M. Barrett, *At the Edge of Empire: The Terek Cossacks and the North Caucasus Frontier, 1700-1860* (Westview Press, 1999), 110; Christoph Witzentrath, *Cossacks and the Russian Empire, 1598-1725: Manipulation, Rebellion and Expansion into Siberia* (Routledge, 2007), 1-8; Kenez, 111-112; Laura Engelstein, *Russia in Flames: War, Revolution, and Civil War, 1914-1921* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 469-486; Smele, 34, 37, 50, 120-121, 123, 125; Robert H. McNeal, *Tsar and Cossack, 1855-1914* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987), 15, 67, 141-142, 208, 245; Philip Longworth, *The Cossacks* (Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1970), 279, 298, 306, 333; Peter Holquist, "'Conduct Merciless Mass Terror': Decossackization on the Don, 1919," *Cahiers du Monde russe*, vol. 38, no. 1/2, *Guerre*,

There are currently two schools of thought on the development of Cossack identity. Some historians such as Peter Holquist and Ja-Jeong Koo contend that the estate system's collapse created an identity void particularly for the Don and Kuban' Cossacks. According to Holquist and Koo, the Cossacks sought to replace their anachronistic estate identity by turning to state-building to create an alternative modern ethnic identity. The only historian to explore the Kuban' separatist phenomenon in any depth, Koo argues that Cossack ethnic identity did not exist prior to 1917. Koo's and Holquist's arguments view *soslovie* as a rigid system that did not permit the Cossacks to have a preexisting ethnic identity before the revolution.<sup>14</sup>

Historians Sheila Fitzpatrick and Peter Kenez similarly interpret the *soslovie* as a rigid system that paralleled the strict class system in eighteenth-century prerevolutionary France. It clearly defined class lines that did not permit preexisting ethnicity or evolution towards a new identity. Serhii Plokhy argues that Cossack ethnic identity only emerged as a concept during the nineteenth century as Cossack-centric leaders resurrected independence themes in mythical Cossack history to leverage greater political autonomy. McNeal, Longworth, and Koo view the system as inflexible since Cossacks could not engage in social mobility, change geographical locations, or avoid military service except under rare conditions. They also consider the Cossacks' insular particularism ultimately doomed in an age of growing universalism.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to the rigid estate paradigm, Alison K. Smith, Olga Andriewsky, Gregory

*guerres civiles et conflits nationaux, dans l'Empire russe et en Russie soviétique, 1914-1922* (January – June 1997): 127; O'Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 11-12.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Holquist, "From Estate to Ethnos: The Changing Nature of Cossack Identity in the Twentieth Century," in Nurit Schleifman, ed., *Russia at a Crossroads: History, Memory and Political Practice* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 89-91; Ja-Jeong Koo, "From an Estate to a Cossack Nation: Kuban' 'Samostiinost', 1917," *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 66, no. 10 (2014): 1-3; Ja-Jeong Koo, "Universalizing Cossack Particularism: The Cossack Revolution in Early Twentieth Century Kuban'," *Revolutionary Russia*, vol. 25, no. 1 (2012): 1649.

<sup>15</sup> Fitzpatrick, 45; Kenez, *Red Advance White Defeat*, 111-112, 117-120; McNeal, 15, 67, 141-142, 208, 245; Longworth, 279, 298, 306, 333; Serhii Plokhy, *The Cossack Myth: History and Nationhood in the Age of Empires* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 366-368; no 1 (February 1986): 21-25; Koo, "From an Estate to a Cossack Nation," 1-3; Koo, "Universalizing Cossack Particularism," 1649-1650.



Freeze, Vera Kaplan, and Martin Confino argue that the estate system represented a more fluid social construct. In this indefinite paradigm, the estate system permitted a level of identity formation. Robert Johnson grapples with the fact that while *soslovie* may have appeared legally straightforward, in practice the estates overlapped in an ambiguous social order. Confino admits that open questions remain in understanding *soslovie*, implying a fluid system that offered more autonomy in practice than in law. O'Rourke disagrees with Holquist's argument that the Don Cossacks did not transition from an estate to an ethnic identity until the revolution. O'Rourke argues that Don Cossack ethnicity not only existed within the estate but expanded into greater autonomy that reflected a desire to return to the days of Zaporizhian Cossack self-rule.<sup>16</sup>

### **Cossack Rights and Tsarist Oaths: Privilege and Obligation in the Estate System**

The estate structure controlled the Kuban' Cossacks' military obligations to the state. By best estimates, active duty Kuban' Cossacks numbered ten divisions on the eve of the First World War. Behind them, the second and third *ocheredi* reserves readied 100,000 to 150,000 men for rapid mobilization. The Cossacks also provided 12,000 men for *plastun*, or dismounted cavalry units. Between 1860, when the Kuban' Cossack *voisko* officially formed, and 1917, the Cossacks carried their Zaporizhian identity into their Kuban' homeland. They retained ethnic dress, traditions, and democratic practices brought with them from the lower Ukraine. By the

<sup>16</sup> Alison K. Smith, *For the Common Good and Their Own Well-Being: Social Estates in Imperial Russia* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7, 9, 30, 104; Andriewsky, 29-30; Vera Kaplan, "From Soslovie to Voluntary Associations: New Patterns of Collective Identities in Late Imperial Russia," *Cahiers du Monde russe*, Dynamiques sociales et classifications juridiques dans l'Empire russe: Du XVIIe siècle à la révolution de 1917, vol. 51, no. 2/3 (Avril-septembre 2010): 370-373, 395; Gregory L. Freeze, "The Soslovie (Estate) and Russian Social History," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 91, no 1 (February 1986): 21; Robert E. Johnson, "Paradigms, Categories, or Fuzzy Algorithms? Making Sense of Soslovie and Class in Russia," *Cahiers du Monde russe*, vol. 51, no. 2/3, Dynamiques sociales et classifications juridiques dans l'Empire russe: Du XVIIe siècle à la révolution de 1917 (Avril-septembre 2010): 463; Michael Confino, "The 'Soslovie' (Estate) Paradigm: Reflections on Some Open Questions," *Cahiers du Monde russe*, vol. 49, no. 4 (Octobre-décembre 2008): 681-685.

First World War, the Cossacks comprised twelve hosts stretching from the Don to the Black Sea, the Terek Cossacks on the Vladikavkaz line, and across Siberia to the Caspian Sea.<sup>17</sup>

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the state relied on the Cossacks to defeat Napoleon Bonaparte, fight the Ottoman Empire, liberate France, control *pogrom* riots, and suppress popular unrest. These aspects of military service earned the Cossacks, who swore loyalty to the Tsar but not the state, both a violent and romantic reputation. Characterized as noble warriors, bloodthirsty reactionaries, or mythical horsemen, the Cossacks represented either an image of freedom or fear in the Russian and western mind. Anti-Cossack propaganda and stereotypes about twentieth-century Cossacks enabled German and Soviet troops to justify atrocities against Cossack soldiers and communities during the First World War and Civil War.<sup>18</sup>

While the Russians considered the Cossacks a military caste rather than a separate people group, the Kuban' Cossacks increasingly saw themselves as a distinct ethnos. The Cossacks

<sup>17</sup> F. I. Eliseev, *Kazaki na Kavkazskom Fronte*, 89, 121, 124, 145-146, 151, 156, 160-161; Denikin, 241; Stevani, 15, 103-104; Kenez, *Red Attack*, 37-39; *Izvestia Vserossiiskogo Soveta Krestyanskikh Deputatov*, no. 88, August 19, 1917; Durand, 60; Squadron of Russian Cossacks, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, The New York Public Library; Marion Aten and Arthur Ormond, *Last Train over Rostov Bridge* (New York: Julian Messner, 1961), 47; Aleksandr Vereshchagin and Isabel F. Hapgood, trans., *At Home and in War, 1853-1881: Reminiscences and Anecdotes* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Company, 1888), 190, 281, 332; Wolley, 87, 122, 131; Stephan Rindlisbacher, "From Space to Territory: Negotiating the Russo-Ukrainian Border, 1919-1928," *Revolutionary Russia*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2018): 93; Boeck, 233-236; Clark, 185, 204; Smele, 33; McNeal, 14-15.

\*Organized between the sixteenth century and Peter I's 1722 reforms, twelve Cossack hosts existed in the Russian empire by 1914: the Kuban' Cossack Host (1860-1920, formerly the Zaporizhian Cossack Host until 1777), the Don Cossack Host (1570-1920), the Terek Cossack Host (1577-1920), Ural Cossack Host (formerly the Yaik Cossacks, 1591-1920), the Astrakhan Cossack Host (1817-1920), Greben Cossack Host (1711-1920), Baikal Cossack Host (1655-1920), Siberian Cossack Host (1582-1918), Orenburg Cossack Host (1755-1920), Transbaikal Cossack Host (1851-1920), Semiryechye Cossack Host (1867-1920), and Ussuri Cossack Host (1889-1922).

<sup>18</sup> *Kazatskii shutki nad Napoleonom*, The New York Public Library Rare Book Division; Durand, 33, 65-66; *Kazatskii sport, ili okhota Platova*, The New York Public Library Rare Book Division, New York Public Library Digital Collections; A. P. A. Korkin and V. Beideman, *i Ko. Velikaia evropeiskaia voina, Skhvatka kazakov s Kurdami v Turtsii*, 1914-1918, Poster Collection: Hoover Institution; Cossack Patrol Near Kazan', Russia, 1892, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division; *Porazhenie turok na erzerumskom frontier*, 1914-1918, Poster Collection: Hoover Institution; Kuban' Cossacks, *Kuban'skoe Generala M.V. Alekseeva Voennoe Uchilishche*, The Vrangeli Collection, 1916-1929, Hoover Institution; *Evropeiskaia voina. Geroiskii podvig Kuban'skikh kazakov*, 1914-1918, Poster Collection: Hoover Institution; Kamyschansky, 112-133; Kuban' Cossack oral history transcript, Schedule A, vol. 5, case 54, Slavic Division: Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, 1950, 23; Denikin, 24; Basil Gourko, *War and Revolution in Russia: 1914-1917* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919), 149.

remained Slavic but ethnically diverse in their genetic composition. Over a period of five hundred years, the Cossacks' rebellious instincts, heterogeneous ethnic makeup, military roles, and affinity for cultural synthesis evolved into a Cossack culture that separated them from the Russian nobility, gentry, merchant, artisan, and peasant classes.<sup>19</sup>

As Cossack identity evolved within the estate during the late nineteenth century, some Kuban' Cossacks remained divided on how they saw themselves: as Ukrainian Cossacks or *Kubantsy*. Unlike the Don Cossacks, Kuban' Cossacks identified more closely with the Ukraine than with Russia. They clung to cultural habits and dress that connected them to their Zaporizhian past. Many still spoke with a slight Ukrainian accent. Kuban' linguistics blended Ukrainian, Circassian, and later Russian words to create a local dialect called Balachka that Russian speakers often struggled to follow. Cossack words such as *sotnia*, *monyet*, and *ataman* differed from Russian words for military unit, *ruble*, and leader. In the Caucasus, the Cossacks named their *stanitsas* for their lost Zaporizhian villages on the Dnieper. Although the Kuban' Cossacks did not consider themselves Ukrainians, they saw themselves as a separate people with strong historical ties to the Ukrainian land. Deeply Orthodox Christian, earthy, and democratic, the Cossacks remained both semi-independent and loyal servants of the Tsar. Cossacks traditions and freedom intrigued and mesmerized Russians who claimed the Cossacks as a unique part of Russian culture. Cossack songs, stories, and sense of self created a spiritual link to their past and anchored them to their Kuban' homeland. By the mid nineteenth century, Cossack separateness assumed an "air of nationality" that identified them as something not quite Russian.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Eliseev, *Kazaki na Kavkazskom Fronte*, 36-137; Sutherland, 57, 75; Mazour, 158; Letherbridge, 54-55; Durand, 34-36; Wolley, 74; Stevani, 41, 50, 101; McCullagh, 113-114, 167.

<sup>20</sup> *Kuban'skoe Kazachestvo*, 1-2, 5; Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR* (Princeton and New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 135; Wolley, 74; Stevani, 50; *Obschestvo revnitatelei Kuban'i*, ed., *Kuban'skoe Kazachestvo. Istoriko Literaturnii i illustrirovanii zhurnal'*, no. 13 (Paris, 1931): 1-2, 5; Hege, 1060; Aten, 85; Durand, 36, 54, Tschebotarioff, "The Cossacks and the Revolution of 1917," 206; Eliseev, *Kazaki na Kavkazskom Fronte*, 158-159; Cossack man from the steppes of Russia, Manuscripts and

By the late nineteenth century, Kuban' Cossack dress continued to distinguish them from Russian peasants, workers, and urban middle classes. Cossack men wore red or white *beshmet* shirts over loose or narrow trousers. During the First World War, a black shirt replaced the conspicuous, traditionally red shirt in an effort to reduce Cossack casualties. Over the *beshmet*, Cossacks wore a long, tight-fitting *cherkesska* uniform with wide sleeves and ornamental cartridge pockets across the chest. While dress uniforms looked flamboyant, many active duty Cossacks wore shabby homespun *cherkesski* over non-regulation, homemade *beshmets*. A niello-silver enameled *kindjal*, or double-edged dagger, tucked into their narrow leather belts. Rather than using the heavy and unwieldy Russian cavalry saber, Cossacks quickly adopted the curved Caucasian *shashka*. Light and strong with a guard-less wooden pommel, the *shashka*'s wide arc and displaced center of gravity made it a flexible and effective combat weapon.<sup>21</sup>

Until the Crimean War period, many Kuban' Cossack men still clung to cultural habits that connected them to their Zaporizhian past. Some hid the forbidden loose or braided scalp lock under longer hair or by tucking it behind one ear. Shaved heads with scalp locks, adopted from their Turkish and Tatar enemies, later disappeared. Some Kuban' men, particularly in His Majesty's Cossack Convoy, shaved their heads in summer. Others wore their thick straight dark hair cropped short under black or white lambskin *papakha* hats. Many Kuban' men wore long,

Archives Division, The New York Public Library, New York Public Library Digital Collections; Mary F. Farley, Informal portrait of a Cossack soldier standing in a ward at the Red Cross Hospital in Kiev, 1914-1915, *Obshchestvo Krasnogo kresta RSFSR, Russia Armii*, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University; Augustus Sherman, Russian Cossacks, c. 1905-1914, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library; A. V. Viskovatov, "Zaporozhets v XVIII stoletii," *Istoricheskoe opisaniie odezhdi i vooruzheniia Rossiiskikh voisk, sostavlennoe po Vysochaishemu povelieniiu*, Slavic and East European Collections, The New York Public Library; Generals of the Kuban', Lemnos, Charles Claflin Davis Papers, 1917-1923, Harvard University Library Collection; Moncada, 4-5; Jersild, 139; Aleksandr Bariatinsky 1861 letter in Andriewsky, 31.

<sup>21</sup> Dmitry White-Fedotoff, *Survival through War and Revolution in Russia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 20; Eliseev, *Kazaki na Kavkazskom Fronte*, 124, 146, 158-159; Aten, 47; Clark, 205-206, 211, 214; Kubanskii *Nieskolko narodnykh tipov Rossii* Collection, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art: Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library; 67; N. Varvara, *Cossack Fury: The Experiences of a Woman Soldier with the White Russians* (London: Hutchinson & Company, 1938), 71.

drooping mustaches that linked their ethnic identity to their Zaporizhian ancestors. “Exceedingly handsome and dead shots,” observed a British correspondent in 1914, the Kuban’ Cossacks also stood taller and thinner than the average medium height Russian soldier.<sup>22</sup>

Military posture and distinct sense of self infused Kuban’ Cossacks with a calm, graceful, and controlled bearing. To outsiders, Cossacks looked stern until their faces relaxed into smiles, or they burst into song or dance. Cossacks often moved slowly but could exhibit lightning-fast reflexes when necessary. *Kubantsy* walked with a flair, resting their left hand on their hip or dagger hilt. They flourished their right hand while speaking for emphasis. Sensitive, perceptive, and formal, the Cossacks projected dignity and confidence. Russian and European visitors to Cossack homes reported the Cossacks’ warmth, kindness, generosity, and hospitality.<sup>23</sup>

On the eve of the First World War, the Russian Imperial Army underwent a modernization process. The Cossack cavalry, which refused to adopt any military organization other than their own, experienced few changes. The Cossacks persisted in using their own military terms, calling a lieutenant a *horunzhy*, their captain an *esaul*, and their colonel *voiskovov starshina*, or host elder. Since the regular army considered the Cossacks irregular cavalry,

<sup>22</sup> Eliseev, *Kazaki na Kavkazskom Fronte*, 99, 121, 124, 158-159, Augustus Sherman, Cossack man from the steppes of Russia, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library; A. V. Viskovatov, *Zaporozhets v XVIII stoletii, Istoricheskoe opisaniie odezhd i vooruzheniia Rossiiskikh voisk, sostavlennoe po Vysochaishemu povelieniiu*, Slavic and East European Collections, The New York Public Library; Generals of the Kuban’, Lemnos, Charles Claflin Davis Papers, 1917-1923, Harvard University Library Collection; Durand, 36, 50, 54; Moussa Bei Tuganov, *From Tsar to Cheka: The Story of a Circassian under Tsar, Padishah, and Cheka* (London: Sampson Low, Marsten & Company, 1936), 22-23; Kamyshansky, 2-3, 7; Wilton, 306, 309-310; Aten, 85; Clark, 211; Vereschagin, 173, 179, 189, 191, 272; Stevani, 41, 101, 188.

<sup>23</sup> Tuganov, 22-23; Eliseev, *Kazaki na Kavkazskom Fronte*, 96, 99, 121, 124, 128, 142, 151, 160-161; Kamyshansky, 11, 84; Stevani, 41, 102; Clark, 204-206; F. I. Eliseev, *Istoria voiskovogo gimna Kubanskogo Kazach’ego Voiska i nash polk* (Paris: 10 rue des Cordelières, 1930), 23; Richard Wilbraham, *Travels in the Trans-Caucasus Mountains and Russia* (London: John Murray, 1839), 136; Wilton, 309-310; Nikolai E. Wrangel, *From Serfdom to Bolshevism: The Memoirs of Baron N. Wrangel, 1847-1920* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1927), 160-161, 207; Markov, 82; Vereschagin, 64, 135-136, 178, 181, 188, 267, 282; Charles C. Young, *Abused Russia* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1915), 56; Kuban’ Cossack cavalry, American National Red Cross Photography Collection Library of Congress; Kuban’ Cossack officers, American National Red Cross Photography Collection, Library of Congress; A Charge of Terek Cossacks, ANRCP Collection, Library of Congress.

Russian officers tended to look down on Cossack officers due to their different military training. Cossack cavalry combined with regular cavalry units and the Caucasian volunteer Native Horse Division, known as the “Wild Division,” brought Russian cavalry strength up to fifty divisions with 120,000 men. Each army corps contained a cavalry division. Each division had a Cossack, Hussar, Dragoon, and Lancer regiment. Each Cossack regiment had six *sotnias*, or companies. Each *sotnia* had one hundred men. The Russian cavalry formed the largest force of trained horseman in modern warfare at that time. Although traditionally trained as cavalry, Kuban’ horsemen adapted professionally to trench warfare. Most fought Turkish troops, allied with the Central Powers, and Kurdish tribes along the Caucasian front during the First World War.<sup>24</sup>

Compulsory, universal military service disrupted and reframed Cossack life. At age eighteen, every male Cossack entered twenty years of mandatory military service. What it meant to be a Cossack at a local level intertwined with their estate identity and created tension between their villages’ needs and the demands of military service. Most Cossacks married prior to entering the service. A Cossack hoped to start a family and provide his parents with an extra worker while away or in case he died on active duty. During the First World War and Civil War, Cossacks fought Turkish troops, Kurds, and Soviets in steep mountains, muddy trenches, and hot steppes. They starved, slept on frozen ground, mourned dead friends, and often did not see their families for years. During this period, most villages remained empty of fighting-age men. When Cossack regiments went into winter quarters, some wives traveled to visit their husbands. For most, the distance and expense required to travel from the North Caucasus proved prohibitive. Cossacks allowed to go home on leave found the train journey long and costly, often leaving

<sup>24</sup> Piotr N. Krasnov, *From the Two-headed Eagle to the Red Flag, 1894-1921* (London: Brentano’s, Ltd., 1923), III: 221; Stevani, 131-132, 136; Gourko, 265-266; Wilton, 212, 311; “Kavkaz Kuban’skie kozaki (Kavaleriia),” Jean S. Raoult. *Nieskolko narodnykh tipov Rossii* Collection, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Photography Collection, The New York Public Library.

them only two weeks to spend in the village. A dead Cossack left behind a family shriveled by grief and impoverished by the loss of their main breadwinner.<sup>25</sup>

On entering the army at eighteen, each man rigorously practiced riding, shooting, and drilling. While the army provided peasant conscripts with military gear, a Cossack had to report for duty bringing his own horse, saddle, equipment, uniform, and sidearms. The state provided a nine-pound Berdan rifle, ammunition, cabbage soup, meat once per week for a Cossack, and fodder for his horse. Compared to Caucasian regiments that often appeared for service fitted out with horses and gear worth between 800 and 1,000 rubles, a small and sturdy Cossack horse and its equipment cost around 150-200 rubles. Cossacks loved horses and yearned to own the larger, faster, and warm-blooded Kabardian horses that cost 200 to 500 rubles.<sup>26</sup>

At age twenty-one, a Cossack entered a four-year service term. At twenty-five, a Cossack could go home for four years. During this time in second-line service, men exercised their horses and cared for their uniforms. Every spring, they left their *stanitsas* to train for a month. Completing this four-year term, a Cossack only had to provide his uniform, weapon, and horse. Due to systematic training and organization, twenty-five to thirty-year-old soldiers had active duty experience and mobilized quickly on demand. By age thirty-five, men entered the reserves. They completed their twenty-year obligatory service as *opolchina*, or militia units.<sup>27</sup>

Despite what outsiders considered Cossack privileges, many Kuban' families lived in such poverty that they spent their last funds providing weapons, a uniform, and a horse so that

<sup>25</sup> *Izvestia Vserossiiskogo Soveta Krestyanskikh Deputatov*, no. 88, 19 August 1917, Yuri Akhapiin, ed., *First Decrees of Soviet Power* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), 23-24; Denikin, 241; Durand, 60; Stevani, 101; Wilton, 313; Kenez, *Red Attack*, 37-39; Eliseev, *Kazaki na Kavkazskom Fronte*, 145-146, 151, 156, 158, 160.

<sup>26</sup> Cossacks [Kuban'], *Harper's Magazine*, New York: Harper Brothers, October 1873; Clark, 211, 214; McCullagh, 112; Durand, 33; Francis Millet, *Campaigning with The Cossacks*, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, New York Public Library; *Kavkaz: Kubanskii Kozaki (Plastuny)*, *Nieskolko narodnykh tipov Rossii* Collection, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, The New York Public Library.

<sup>27</sup> Durand, 58-59; John Pollock, *War and Revolution in Russia: Sketches and Studies* (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1918), 155.

their sons could fight the state's wars. Sometimes a family had too many sons and could not afford a horse for each one. Many families, too poor to buy a combat animal, had to purchase a horse on credit. Often a man died in battle before he could pay off his horse. A Cossack's horse then transferred to a horseless man in his regiment while his commander sent the sale money back home to the Cossack's wife or father in the *stanitsa*. When a Kuban' man could not afford a horse by any means, he joined the *plastuny*, or dismounted Cossack regiments.<sup>28</sup>

The Kuban' Cossacks integrated Zaporizhian fighting traditions such as the *lava* equestrian attack with Caucasian guerilla tactics that frequently made the difference between victory and defeat. The Cossacks used guerilla warfare tactics gleaned from centuries of fighting Tatars and Circassians. When allowed to follow their own irregular tactics rather than standard European military protocol, the Kuban' Cossacks lost fewer men in battle than regular Russian troops. During the Russo-Turkish War in 1877, the Russian war artist Vasily Vereshchagin observed how Russian soldiers lined up in the open to fight, while Kuban' Cossack officers gave their men freedom to adapt their fighting methods to the situation in ways that helped them pick off enemy troops from a sheltered position while conserving their numbers. Tucking their *cherkesski* into their dagger belts, the Cossacks crouched behind bushes and trees, glanced out, fired, and ducked back again.<sup>29</sup> During the First World War, Cossacks swam their horses across rivers, crawled across shell-shot wasteland, and emerged suddenly from trenches for night

<sup>28</sup> Irina Bryzgalova Genrikhovna and Marina Viktorovna Bratolyubova, "February of 1917: The Cossacks' Approach to Resolving the Agrarian Issue, Based on the Materials of the Don, the Kuban', and Terek," *European Science Review*, no. 34 (March 2017): 10-11; Akhapkin, 24-26; Durand, 33; Cossacks [Kuban'], written on the border, October 1873, *Harper's Magazine*, New York: Harper Brothers; Clark, 211, 214; McCullagh, 112; Francis David Millet, "Campaigning with The Cossacks," 1887, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, New York Public Library; "Kavkaz: Kubanskii Kozaki, *Nieskolko narodnykh tipov Rossii* Collection, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, New York Public Library.

<sup>29</sup> Vereshchagin, 135-136, 344; Stevani, 103-104.



attacks. Barbed wire failed to stop them. Throwing their rugged black felt *burka* cloaks over the razor wire, the Cossacks leaped down on surprised Turkish or Austrian troops.<sup>30</sup>

During the Russo-Turkish War, the First World War, and Russian Civil War, Kuban' horsemen also deployed a cavalry tactic called the *lava*. Designed to confuse and surround the enemy, the *lava* helped to offset the difference between outnumbered Cossack units and larger forces. At Tsaritsyn in 1919, as the Soviets appeared in the distance, a Cossack regiment composed of six *sotnias* deployed facing them in a chain formation. A quiver ran through the ranks as a strong emotional bond tightened between the men. In that moment, each soldier became a man's brother, his family, his village. When the commander raised his *shashka*, the *sotnia* flared out in a wild gallop. Dust billowed across the steppe. They could almost see their enemies' faces. Suddenly, the mass split apart. Cavalrymen wheeled in all directions. Horses leaped to the side or skittered backward. Delighted at the Cossacks' retreat, the enemy lunged after them. Then the Cossack chain fused back together with lightning speed to engulf the enemy's flank and rear. This irregular cavalry tactic succeeded due to each Cossack's individual fighting quality and the intuitive support that the men gave each other. Rather than allowing the Cossacks to utilize this underused tactic and form an extended line to execute a *lava* attack, some Russian commanders ordered the Cossacks to line up in a dense formation to intimidate the enemy. These bulky columns presented a larger target and often resulted in heavy losses.<sup>31</sup>

A Cossack officer remained on close, respectful, and equal terms with his soldiers. Trapped between military orders and practical concerns, Cossack officers hated needlessly

<sup>30</sup> Eliseev, *Istoriia*, 23; Cossacks Picking Up A Wounded Comrade, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, New York Public Library. New York Public Library Digital Collections; Wilton, 307; Wolley, 96, 116; Tschebotarioff, "The Cossacks and the Revolution of 1917," 206.

<sup>31</sup> Markov, 82; Eliseev, *Kazaki na Kavkazskom Fronte*, 151-152, 158, 160; Vereshchagin, 135-136; The triumph after the charge, Mirgorod, American National Red Cross Photography Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division; Aten, 81-83; Wilton, 313; Tschebotarioff, *Russia, My Native Land*, 240-241.

risking their men's lives. Cossack officers often acted independently apart from the Russian high command when analyzing the situation on the ground. They also took personal responsibility for their men, knowing that they had to face their wives and families when they returned to the village. In contrast to Russian soldiers, herded together based on physical similarities and led by officers with no personal connection to them, Cossack troops usually came from the same village. Common ethnic identity and local relationships created close-knit units. On the battlefield, Cossacks refused to leave wounded comrades behind, risking their lives to carry them out or give them an Orthodox burial under gunfire. During the 1917 revolutions, Kuban' Cossack troops generally maintained order. Most Cossacks refused to betray or kill their own officers.<sup>32</sup>

### **Cossack-centrism**

Since the Cossacks' formal organization into a military estate, the government denied the Cossacks the right to elect their own supreme ataman. The Tsar remained absolute commander over the host. Below the emperor, the state appointed a Russian governor-general, or *nakaznyi*, to command each Cossack *voisko*. The general often knew little about the Cossacks and remained remote from their lifestyle. Although Cossack nobles obtained land grants for military rank and service, the Cossacks resented this lack of choice. Elite sons trained in regular military schools or entered the Cossack College in St. Petersburg. While Kuban' Cossacks retained their own schools adjoining traditional army colleges, they held themselves slightly aloof. During the reform period in the 1860s, the Cossack elites prioritized a "Cossack-centric" focus that merged the elites with the Cossack rank and file in a shared ethnos. Kuban' Cossack elites and peasants

<sup>32</sup> Sokolov, 5-6, 9-10; Eliseev, *Kazaki na Kavkazskom Fronte*, 151-152, 158, 160; Kamyshansky, 13; Tschebotarioff, *Russia, My Native Land*, 222; Wilton, 307; Wolley, 96, 116; Eliseev, *Istoriia*, 23; "Cossacks Picking Up A Wounded Comrade" 1915, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library Digital Collections; Tschebotarioff, "The Cossacks and the Revolution of 1917," 206.

resisted the imposition of the *zemstvo* system, a post-reform structure designed to administer the provinces (*oblasti*) in bureaucratic strata from the village to the senate level. Between the end of the eighteenth century and the revolution, Cossack elites and intelligentsia struggled with the War Ministry over the legitimate head of the Cossack host. Tensions continued between concepts of pan-Slavic unity and Cossack separateness.<sup>33</sup>

Cossack privileges and collective identity remained central to the Kuban' nationalist movement. While military service placed the Cossacks squarely within the estate system, the decentralized nature of the Cossack *soslovie* enabled Kuban' Cossack identity to exist and evolve within the estate. The land given to the Cossack host in exchange for their military service created tensions between Cossack landowners and Russian tenants in the North Caucasus. Growing efforts for self-government, conflicting land rights, the economic strain imposed by military service, and discussions about the Cossack estate as an anachronistic system increased towards the early twentieth century.<sup>34</sup> The social and economic patterns, hierarchies, and bitterness bred under serfdom and unresolved in the late imperial period created a complicated and volatile relationship with the land and those that owned it.

<sup>33</sup> Kamyshansky, 12, 28-29, 33; Markov, 81; Littauer, 11-12; Wilton, 310, 370; Jersild, 12-13; Price, 94; Remnev, Hagen, and Burbank, 359; O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants*, 35, 37; Durand, 65; Stephen Velychenko, "Identities, Loyalties, and Service in Imperial Russia: Who Administered the Borderlands?" *The Russian Review*, vol. 54, no. 2 (April 1995): 190-191; Landsberger, 216-217; Victor Serge and Peter Sedgewick, trans., *Year One of the Russian Revolution* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015), 370; Kerensky, *Prelude to Bolshevism*, 297; Guins, 60, 66; Kuban' Cossack interview, oral history transcript, Schedule A, vol. 5, case 54, Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, Slavic Division: Widener Library, Harvard University, 1950, 12.

<sup>34</sup> Leon Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), 110; Tschebotarioff, *Russia, My Native Land*, 223; Krasnov, *From the Two-Headed Eagle to the Red Flag*, IV: 190; Guins, 66; Heald, 352-353; Price, 164; Kenez, *Red Attack, White Resistance*, 39; Tschebotarioff, "The Cossacks and the Revolution of 1917," 211; Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 176; Piotr N. Wrangel, *Always with Honor* (New York: Robert Speller, 1957), 104-105; Paul E. Heineman, "In Defense of an Anachronism: The Cossack Question on the Don, 1861-1914," Georgetown University, 1999, 18-20.

## Chapter II

### Land

#### Localism and Spatial Identity in the Kuban'

The broad Kuban' River, flowing between silver willow trees, announced the entrance to the Cossack lands. In the distance, the jagged Caucasus Mountain peaks thrust up from broad grassland steppes. Geographically isolated from the country's interior, the Kuban' Cossacks retained a direct, local self-government process and forged a deep connection with the land. Until 1917, daily life in the Caucasus remained largely insular apart from military duties that disrupted agricultural rhythms and the family economy. The obligation to perform twenty years' military service both gave the Cossacks their land and took them away from it. The land remained a tangible symbol of compensation for the heavy weight placed on the Cossacks by military service. Since the state granted these lands to the corporate Cossack *voisko*, the Cossacks could not buy, sell, or privately own communal land. When not called upon to die for the Tsar, the Cossacks engaged in herding, fishing, and farming the fertile black soil fields.<sup>35</sup>

When the Cossacks first settled along the Kuban' River, thousands of escaped serfs and soldiers settled there with them. Peasant flight to the North Caucasus escalated during the 1820s after the government resettled groups of state peasants there. Private serfs also pursued rumors about freedom and tax exemption in the south. In 1826, Nicholas I declared that serfs that fled to the Caucasus would receive heavy punishments. Despite the state's punitive stance on fugitive serfs, thousands flooded into the Caucasus until the abolition of serfdom thirty years later. These

<sup>35</sup> Eliseev, *Kazaki na Kavkazskom Fronte*, 137, 163; Bogaevsky, 72; Brower and Lazzarini, 242; Kavkaz: Kubanskii Kozak, *Nieskolko narodnykh tipov Rossii* Collection, New York Public Library; Durand, 33, 48 50, 52-53, 62, 64; Kamyshansky, 12; Clark, 209-201; Kuban', South Russia, American National Red Cross Photography Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division; Kenez, *Red Attack, White Resistance*, 37.

outsiders settled beside the Cossacks where local authorities ignored their unfree origins.<sup>36</sup>

Due to a labor shortage in the Caucasus, the Kuban' Cossacks also sent agents north to incite serfs to flee south. Armed by the Cossacks, men returned to the Don and central Volga regions to rescue their families from serfdom. Fugitive serfs swarmed to the fortress at Anapa to receive Cossack protection. Some of these fugitives, turned bandits, adopted the persona of free Cossacks.<sup>37</sup> "Always going about armed like Zaporizhian Cossacks," these groups did not have the Cossacks' sense of ethnic identity and did not embrace their military obligations.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, Cossacks sheltered ex-serfs in farms and *stanitsas*, hired them to work in their fields, or enrolled them in Cossack service. Free settlement and the rarity of the manorial village, the primary social formation in rural Russia before 1861, characterized the socioeconomic landscape in the North Caucasus. By 1857, less than three percent of the Black Sea Stavropol province, and the Kuban' and Terek territorial divisions (*oblasty*) had a serf-based land system.<sup>39</sup> The Cossack regions represented the smallest percentage of serfs in the entire Russian empire.

Until the October Revolution, the Cossacks practiced simple and self-sufficient socialism. For non-Cossacks, the commune (*mir*) represented the first link in the authority chain extending from the peasant household to the state. Cossack self-government bypassed regular civilian administration. It rose from the village assembly (*sbor*) to the Cossack host administration, to the *Nakaznyi Ataman*, and then to the Tsar. The entire Cossack community voted on decisions

<sup>36</sup> Zenon E. Kohut, *Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy: Imperial Absorption of the Hetmanate, 1760s-1830s* (Harvard University Press, 1988), 213-218; Barrett, "Lines of Uncertainty," 596-597; Obschestvo revnitatei Kuban'i, ed., *Kuban'skoe Kazachestvo, Istoriko Literaturnii i illustrirovannii zhurnal*, no. 13 (1931): 10-11, 20; Thomas Barrett, "'The Land is spoiled by Water': Cossack Colonization in the North Caucasus," *Environment and History*, vol. 5, no. 1 (February 1999): 27-52.

<sup>37</sup> Eliseev, *Kazaki na Kavkazskom Fronte*, 128, 136, 163; Bogaevsky, 75; Kosok, 46; Tschebotarioff, "The Cossacks and the Revolution," 206; Guins, 66; O'Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 153; McCullagh, 167; Kenez, *Red Attack*, 37-39; Charles F. Coxwell, *Through Russia in Wartime* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1917), 218, 240; Durand, 33; Aten, 47; Moltchanoff, 16; Clark, 209; Wilton, 101, 307; 37-39; Price, 94.

<sup>38</sup> Barrett, "Lines of Uncertainty," 595, 597.

<sup>39</sup> Barrett, "Lines of Uncertainty," 596-598.

involving elections, land distribution, and fishing rights. They rotated fields among their neighbors, sharing animals or farm equipment as needed. Individual freedom otherwise remained broad. In 1918, the Cossacks initiated a land reform program that combined evolving attitudes towards private property with traditional estate concepts. While the Cossacks welcomed private property ownership, they rejected land socialization and insisted that the land remain within the Cossack host patrimony. Many preferred to redistribute *voisko* land on a private ownership basis exclusively to Cossacks rather than to Russian nonresidents living in the area.<sup>40</sup>

After the abolition of serfdom in 1861, the state implemented the *zemstvo* system throughout rural Russia. The *zemstvo*, a bureaucratic structure designed to collect taxes, improve rural conditions, and administer 43 provinces from the village to the senate level, offered former serfs the chance to participate in local government via elected delegates. The Cossack assembly, led by a popularly elected ataman, allowed all male or female heads household heads to vote on local affairs. Rather than accepting the *zemstvo* system that required them to rely on delegates rather than voting as a community, the Cossacks fought to retain their own local elections. They rejected efforts to incorporate them into the new system because it also threatened to turn them into a taxed peasant estate. In a practically unanimous decision, most Cossacks resisted sending delegates to the *zemstvo* because they feared this would transfer property from the *voisko* to the *zemstvo* and from military to civilian control. If this transition occurred, it could allow nonresident settlers to gain control over Cossack land.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Denikin, *Russian Turmoil*, 240; Kenez, *Red Attack, White Resistance*, 38-39; Hodgson, 30; G. V. Nemirovich-Danchenko, *Krymu pri Vrangeli: fakty i itogi* (Berlin: R. Oldenburg, 1922), 9; Wolley, 88; Toje, 1061; Price, 94; McNeal, 165; Leon Trotsky, "The Lesson of the Mironov Affair," 16 September 1919, order no. 95, in *How the Revolution Armed*, 428; I. Borisenko, *Sovetskie respubliki na Cevnom Kavkaze in 1918 godu* (Rostov: Knigoizdatel'stvo Severn'ii Kavkaz, 1930), II:5.

<sup>41</sup> Paul E. Heineman, "The Last Cossack Rebellion?: The Campaign to Implement the *Zemstvo* on the Don," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, vol. 46, issue 3 (January 2012): 311; A. E. Janke, "The Don Cossacks on the Road to Independence," *Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, vol. 12, no. 3 (Fall 1970): 274; Alfred J. Rieber, "Landed Property, State Authority, and Civil War," *Slavic Review*, vol. 47, no. 1 (Spring

In the 1860s, the Cossack hosts proposed laws to prevent the *zemstvo* from interfering in their internal affairs. During the anti-*zemstvo* crisis in the 1870s, the Don leaders threatened to cut the host off from Russia, “surround it with an impenetrable barrier, and within this enclosed circle to create an entirely separate internal administration.”<sup>42</sup> Similar movements proved underway in the Kuban’. Cossack nationalist politician I. L. Makarenko vigorously protested the *zemstvo* that threatened Cossack self-sufficiency. By 1917, Kuban’ Cossack nationalists, elites, and peasants voted that the Cossack people would remain better off without state interference.<sup>43</sup>

During the Russian legal codification in 1835, the state standardized the terms for Cossack service. According to the estate system, the Cossack host owned the land communally. Cossacks received no pay for military duty except a rye ration and a rotating land allotment. The state determined that a Cossack earned thirty *desiatiny* or 81 acres of arable land for performing military service. By 1900, this number shrank to between nine and twenty-three *desiatiny*, an average of 24.3 to 62.1 acres per Cossack. Although Cossacks farmed with traditional methods, they also employed new agricultural techniques from Western Europe, and knew how to ship their produce on time to maximize freshness for the northern markets. Each year, householders gathered to redistribute land for each family’s needs. The redistribution system demonstrated how the Cossack commune not only worked to redistribute land effectively but sought to

1988): 29, 34-35; Alexander Polunov, Thomas C. Owen, and Larissa G. Zakharova, *Russia in the Nineteenth Century: Autocracy, Reform, and Social Change, 1814-1914* (Routledge, 2015), 208; O’Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 140, 144; 91; Thomas S. Pearson, *Russian Officialdom in Crisis: Autocracy and Local Self-Government, 1861-1900* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 107; Moshe Lewin, “Customary Law and Russian Rural Society in the Post-Reform Era,” *The Russian Review*, vol. 44, no. 1 (January 1985): 5; Alexey Volvenko, “The Zemstvo Reform, the Cossacks, and Administrative Policy on the Don, 1864-1882,” in Remnev, Hagen, and Burbank, 348, 361-362.

<sup>42</sup> Volvenko, 351.

<sup>43</sup> Denikin, 244; Janke, 274-276; Holquist, “From Estate to Ethnos,” 92; McNeal, 147, 151, 155; Andriewsky, 36, 38.

responsibly balance limited resources with land utilization to promote collective wellbeing.<sup>44</sup>

Each land allotment depended on a Cossack's rank. Once a Cossack became a commissioned officer or reached the ninth grade on the Table of Ranks, he received noble status for life. The government granted Cossack elites non-rotating land without hereditary rights. In addition to lifetime land security, Cossack nobles received a small army salary. Although many supplemented this meager income by renting out land, Cossack elites still did not earn enough to place them on equal social and economic footing with the Russian nobility.<sup>45</sup>

As individually allotted land strips dwindled between 1900 and 1917, many Cossack households struggled to sustain their families and generate a ready cash income required to fulfil military service's financial demands. Meanwhile, the financial costs associated with military duty continued to rise. Compared to the increasingly impoverished Don, where the *voisko* could only spare around 46 rubles towards a Cossack's service expenses, the Kuban' *voisko* remained somewhat more prosperous. Working from a budget that ran in the black, more from effective administration than from surplus resources, the Kuban' host typically contributed an average of 107 rubles to a Cossack who could not afford horse or equipment. Although Cossacks could not sell communal land to defray military costs, renting out fields to the nonresidents worked as a short-term solution. Land rents provided the host with its highest profits, but the increase in land rental highlighted the inflexible nature of land supply. Renting out strips significantly reduced the amount of land available for Cossack families' use, perpetuating a cycle of land insufficiency and tensions between Cossack landowners and nonresident tenants.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Volvenko, 349-350; O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants*, 71-72, 80; Peter Holquist, "From Estate to Ethnos: The Changing Nature of Cossack Identity in the Twentieth Century," in Nurit Schleifman, ed., *Russia at a Crossroads: History, Memory and Political Practice* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 92.

<sup>45</sup> O'Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 172, 190; O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants*, 71-72; Longworth, 269; Volvenko, 355-356; McNeal, 180, 187.

<sup>46</sup> Volvenko, 349-350, 354; McNeal, 168, 180; Janke, 273; O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants*, 71-72, 80; Holquist, "From Estate to Ethnos," 92; Boris Mironov, "The Russian Peasant Commune after the Reforms of the



## Black Earth and Land Hunger

The end of serfdom exacerbated existing agrarian issues when the 1861 statutes transferred land to village communes collectively rather than to individual peasants. While the government compensated landowners a total of 902 million rubles out of a national budget of 3.4 billion rubles for releasing their unfree labor force, the rural gentry experienced widespread insolvency from property loss up until 1917. Former serfs also could not privately own property until they succeeded in paying off the redemption dues on the land. Many destitute former serfs ended up paying rates of 5.6 percent annual interest for insufficient, infertile, or marshy land. By 1905, 9.5 million out of 12.3 million peasant households throughout the fifty western Russian provinces received scattered land strips distributed via the village commune system (*obshchiny*). Under this land commune structure, the village owned and redistributed land based on the number of “mouths” in the village. In the absence of private land ownership, land redistribution ensured that no family received only poor quality or over-stripped fields. Despite these efforts, many peasants ended up with narrow strips scattered miles apart and subject to the commune’s traditional, inefficient, and low-yield three-field cultivation method.<sup>47</sup>

1860s.” *Slavic Review*, vol. 44, no. 3 (Autumn 1985): 445-447; Orlando Figes, “Collective Farming and the 19th-Century Russian Land Commune: A Research Note,” *Soviet Studies*, vol. 38, no. 1 (January 1986): 95; Longworth, 269, 281; O’Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 140, 144, 172, 190.

<sup>47</sup> Peter Toumanoff, “The Development of the Peasant Commune in Russia.” *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 41, no. 1, *The Tasks of Economic History* (March 1981): 184; George Yaney, “Some Suggestions Regarding the Study of Russian Peasant Society prior to Collectivization,” *The Russian Review*, vol. 44, no. 1 (January 1985): 29; Dorothy Atkinson, “The Statistics on the Russian Land Commune, 1905-1917,” *Slavic Review*, vol. 32, no. 4 (December 1973): 376-377, 784; Shane O’ Rourke, “The Don Cossacks during the 1905 Revolution: The Revolt of Ust-Medveditskaia Stanitsa,” *The Russian Review*, vol. 57, no. 4 (October 1998): 584; David Darrow, “Agrarian Experts and Social Justice: Land Allotment Norms in Revolution and Civil War, 1917-1920,” *Cahiers du Monde russe*, vol. 57, no. 1, *Terres, sols et peuples: expertise agricole et pouvoir (XIX- XX siècles) / Land, soil and people: Agricultural expertise and power (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries)* (Janvier-mars 2016): 55; Lewin, 108, 110-112; McNeal, 164, 168; Steven A. Grant, “*Obshchina* and *Mir*.” *Slavic Review*, vol. 35, no. 4 (December 1976): 636, 639, 643, 649-650; Sergei Witte and Abraham Yarmolinsky, translator, *The Memoirs of Count Witte* (New York and Toronto: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1921), 277.

For rural Russians, their identity remained deeply rooted in the land. In prerevolutionary Russia, the word *mir* represented both the village commune and the world. The concept of *mir* also represented the real and idealized elements of Holy Russia, a people and space both literal and figurative, spiritual and earthly. For the Cossacks, the Kuban' space created a sense of homeland that did not extend to the rest of Russia. The land physically and emotionally bounded the corners of their world. In the peasant worldview, the soil belonged to the whole world. In a perspective born from serfdom, peasants believed that the land belonged to the people that worked it rather than to the land's legal owners. This conviction encountered complications when peasants, obsessed with the desire for more land, could not explain why the earth that belonged to everyone should belong to them more than to their neighbors. Sufficient fertile land not only meant the difference between starvation and survival but offered former serfs a sense of material security. As peasants endeavored to increase their land holdings, some did not hesitate to resort to violence against the land's legal owners to improve their situation.<sup>48</sup>

Land shortages, inequalities, and agrarian disasters fostered "land hunger" (*malozemel'ie*) as peasants struggled for subsistence and longed to expropriate land from landowners. The end of serfdom created a national land question as former serfs and peasants pursued a level of land ownership and mobility previously denied to them. In the post-serfdom reform period, particularly between the agrarian failure in 1891 and resettlement legislation in 1901, the

<sup>48</sup> Semyon Martynov, "Man and the Land, August 1917," in Mark D. Steinberg, *Voices of Revolution, 1917* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2001), 242; Cathy A. Frierson, *Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); 76-77, 88; O'Rourke, "The Don Cossacks during the 1905 Revolution," 587-588; N. E. Wrangel, 144-145; Kuban' Cossack oral history transcript, Schedule A, vol. 26, case no. 511, Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, Slavic Division: Widener Library, Harvard University, 1950, 35; William C. Fuller, Jr., *Civil-Military Conflict in Imperial Russia, 1881-1914* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 20, 146, 152, 154; Eliseev, *Istoriia*, 18, 23; Witte, 77, 138; Grant, 650; Hodgson, 30; Genrikhovna and Bratolyubova, 10-11; Akhapiin, 24-26.

government opened up the North Caucasus to ease agrarian pressures and stimulate peasant immigration. Land-hungry peasants flooded into Cossack lands. They found that the Cossack *voisko* already possessed large land tracts. In contrast to a gentry dominance in central Russia and the Don area to the north, the Kuban' region had few large landowners but many middling farmers and poor peasants. A handful of Cossack elites owned 1,000-2,000 acres in rich arable land. Bitter divisions emerged, not along standard class lines, but between Cossacks and *inogorodnye* nonresidents. A complicated agrarian question developed.<sup>49</sup>

The influx of landless peasants into the Kuban' area created a new land shortage issue. Although the Cossacks owned the majority of land, they did not represent a numerical majority. Between the Circassians and the immigrants, the Cossacks made up 46 percent of the 3 million people in the Kuban'. Within this demographic, 27 percent of the nonresidents owned land. As rents rose, so did the outsiders' resentment. Nonresident workers migrated to the capital at Ekaterinodar where they formed a radical, anti-Cossack core. In spite of the acreage inequalities, many nonresident peasants eventually became wealthier than their Cossack landlords.<sup>50</sup>

The land sufficiency question remained dominant in the government's minds. Following the 1905 Revolution, the state recognized the destabilizing danger that popular unrest posed for the empire. Tsar Nicholas II established the Duma, an elected legislative body that permitted popular representation. The First Duma and Second Duma, composed from more liberal groups such as workers, peasants, and the empire's non-Russian peoples, proposed

<sup>49</sup> Borisenko, II:5, 20; Wilton, 101, 99-100; Willard Sutherland, "The 'Colonization Question': Visions of Colonization in Late Imperial Russia," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge*, Bd. 48, H. 2 (2000): 214, 217; David Moon, "The Environmental History of the Russian Steppes: Vasilii Dokuchaev and the Harvest Failure of 1891," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 15 (2005): 149; Fedotoff-White, 182-183; Price, 163-164; Tuganov, 14; The Russian Government, ed., *Svod" Zakonov" Rossiiskoi Imperii* (Petrograd, 1916), I:127.

<sup>50</sup> Trotsky, "The Lesson of the Mironov Affair," order no. 95, 428, 16 September 1919, in *How the Revolution Armed*, II:5; Pavel N. Miliukov, *Russia, Today and Tomorrow* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), 140; Borisenko, II: 5, 20; Wilton, 101, 99-100; Fedotoff-White, 182-183; Price, 94, 163-164; Tuganov, 14; Denikin, 240; Kenez, *Red Attack, White Resistance*, 38-39; Hodgson, 30; Danchenko, 92, 112; Wolley, 88.

sweeping reforms too radical for the tsarist regime to accept. The Moscow Peasant Congress argued for land appropriation from the gentry landowners (*pomeshchiki*) without compensation. Other elites such as the Russian gentry and Cossacks pursued liberal policies until faced with the threat of forcible land loss. After the Tsar dissolved the Second Duma, the Third Duma swung to the political right. From 1907 to 1911, Prime Minister Piotr Arkadyevich Stolypin instituted land reforms aimed at quickly deconstructing the peasant commune and facilitating private ownership. The peasant commune's rapid dissolution, failure to grant full legal rights such as the right to inheritance, and the scramble to claim available land created new tensions. Due to their refusal to transition to a taxed peasant estate and the government's unwillingness to release them from service, the Cossacks remained under the *voisko* communal land system.<sup>51</sup>

### **The Cossacks versus the *Inogorodnye***

The 1835 charter granting the Kuban' Cossacks land in the North Caucasus remained vague about whether the Tsar's warriors owned unconditional rights to the *voisko* land. In 1866, the Temporary Committee for the Review of Cossack Statutes nearly applied the redemption law, which required former serfs to recompense the state for the land, to the Cossacks. The

<sup>51</sup> Witte, 380, 388; Paul G. Klebnikov, "Agricultural Development in Russia, 1906-1917: Land Reform, Social Agronomy, and Cooperation," *The London School of Economics and Political Science*, 1991, 142-143, 148; Anita B. Lampe-Baker, "The Development of the Peasant Commune in Russia," *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 41, no. 1, *The Tasks of Economic History* (March 1981): 185-186; O'Rourke, "The Don Cossacks during the 1905 Revolution," 594-595; Mary Schaeffer Conroy, *Emerging Democracy in Late Imperial Russia: Case Studies on Local Self-Government (the Zemstvos), State Duma Elections, the Tsarist Government, and the State Council before and during World War I* (University Press of Colorado, 1998), 142; Atkinson, 770, 776-777, 783; Judith Pallot, *Land Reform in Russia, 1906-1917: Peasant Responses to Stolypin's Project of Rural Transformation* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 172; Corinne Gaudin, "'No Place to Lay My Head': Marginalization and the Right to Land during the Stolypin Reforms," *Slavic Review*, vol. 57, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 747, 773.

\* Following the Stolypin agrarian reforms, the peasant commune no longer had administrative tenure or fiscal control over the land. Land no longer reverted back to the commune upon the head of the household's death and land ownership now moved outside the *mir*'s control when sold to an outsider. Those peasants that opposed *ukreplenie* reforms generally did not want absentee migrant workers to return to claim their share from the former communal lands. The commune's rapid and inorganic dissolution under the 1911 reforms contributed to local chaos but enabled around 2.2 million peasants to become private landowners before 1917.

committee decided not to move in this direction because it would allow Cossacks who paid off their dues to privately own and sell land to non-Cossacks. They worried that this type of economic framework might conflict with the Cossacks' military duties. Rather than clarifying the *voisko*'s land ownership rights, the committee let the charters stand without clarification. In the 1880s, the War Department and state bureaucracy reinforced the idea that defining Cossack land rights would infringe on the Tsar's right to dispose of these lands by imperial *ukase*. While the government gave the Cossacks land for military service, they refused to issue legislation guaranteeing the Cossacks unalienable rights to their land.<sup>52</sup>

The state's ambiguous position on the Cossacks' legal right to the land brought Cossack landowners and *inogorodnye* renters into conflict. Nonresidents remained outside the Cossack estate system. They did not have permanent resident status since they held internal passports from the regions from which their ancestors emigrated. Over time, the outsiders came to consider the land that they rented as their property. The Cossacks believed that the land, bought with blood as payment for their military service, could not belong to anyone except the corporate Cossack community. They viewed the increasingly radical *inogorodnye* as encroachers on Cossack property. Tsarist authorities continued to hedge declaring exactly who owned the land occupied by the Cossacks and the nonresidents. Instead, the government offered a vague recognition that both Cossacks and nonresidents had rights to the same land.<sup>53</sup>

While the Cossacks pursued their own self-government system in the Kuban', the *inogorodnye* also struggled to assert local power. Nonresident deputies carried the outsiders'

<sup>52</sup> Denikin, 240-242; McNeal, 2, 107-108; O'Rourke, "The Don Cossacks during the 1905 Revolution," 584-586, 598; Janke, 273; Holquist, "From Estate to Ethos," 91; O'Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 172, 190.

<sup>53</sup> McNeal, 168; Janke, 273; O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants*, 71-72, 80; Holquist, "From Estate to Ethnos," 92; Mironov, 445-447; Figs, "Collective Farming," 95; Longworth, 269, 281; O'Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 140, 144, 172, 190; Volvenko, 349-350, 355-356. O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants*, 71-72; Longworth, 269.

demands before the Duma, requesting the state to enforce the *zemstvo* in Cossack regions to give the nonresidents more weight in local government. The Cossacks recognized the problems that self-government presented in a region that contained a heterogenous population. They agreed that the *inogorodnye* deserved to have a voice in local affairs. Unresolved issues regarding land and representation eventually exploded into conflict after the October Revolution.<sup>54</sup>

### ***Volya and Soslovie: Problems in Cossack Service and Government***

The land issue intersected with autonomy at the village and *voisko* levels. By Russian law and Cossack tradition, the *voisko* remained an autonomous, self-sustaining corporate body. The Tsar stood at the top. The state appointed a non-Cossack *Nakaznyi Ataman* as governor-general over the host. Tensions remained between the myth of loyalty between Tsar and Cossack and their collective memory that harked back to free Cossack ancestors that escaped authority to rule themselves in the open steppe. The image of the free Cossack, an emphasis on free will (*volya*), and popular law concepts still resonated strongly with the Kuban' Cossacks. Ultimately, the Cossacks remained torn between estate privileges and the desire for autonomy.<sup>55</sup>

In the years prior to 1917, the Cossacks remained committed to private property principles that involved houses, yards, gardens, stables, and personal property, while accepting the estate system's conditions that the land belonged to the corporate Cossack *voisko*. The contract between Tsar and Cossack, land in exchange for military service, grew complicated and economically devastating for the Cossacks in the years before the revolution. While the myth of

<sup>54</sup> Kuban' Cossack oral history transcript, Schedule A, vol. 26, case no. 511, Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, Widener Library, Harvard University, 1950, 35; Mazour, 407; Sokolov, 58; Borisenko, II:19-21. Remnev, Hagen, and Burbank, 359; O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants*, 35, 37; Durand, 64-65; Velychenko, 188; N. E. Wrangel, 160-161; Eliseev, *Kazaki na Kavkazskom Fronte*, 96, 99, 121-122, 124, 128, 158; Markov, 82; Wolley, 86; Marschak, 282; Stevani, 49-50; Eliseev, *Istoriia*, 23; Varvara, 40; Wilton, 310; Clarke, 204, 211-212.

<sup>55</sup> Kuban' Cossack oral history transcript, schedule A, vol. 26, case no. 511, Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, 1950, 34; McNeal, 4-5, 98, 150; Volvenko, 350; O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants*, 117.

Tsar and Cossack connected them with service ties to the emperor, the Cossacks also experienced an underlying resentment towards the system that laid heavy military and economic burdens on them. The Cossacks' attempts to assert *volya* highlighted the inherent tensions between autocracy and democracy and between state-rule and self-rule.<sup>56</sup>

In 1835, when the state formalized the Cossack estate's terms and conditions, they recognized the Cossacks' rights to historic forms of self-government represented in *stanitsa* assemblies also known as *sbory*. The Cossacks retained the right to elect their own ataman to administer village affairs. During election times, household heads gathered in the *sbor* to elect an ataman. Atamans now played a trusted and critical role in local government as they handled daily business, heard petitions, settled disputes, explained new laws, collected taxes, arrested criminals, negotiated problems with land cultivation, and convened the assembly. Some atamans administered multiple villages within their jurisdiction. During the Civil War, one disabled Cossack colonel ran twenty-three *stanitsas*. Standing between the government and the people, atamans held both popular and state support. In the struggle between local atamans and the state during the late nineteenth century, the government became unable to curb the popular leaders' power. Instead, the government began to grant broad autonomy to Cossack atamans.<sup>57</sup>

Cossack *stanitsas* ran on a democratic and community participation basis. All Cossacks obeyed the communal will voiced by the village assembly. In an agrarian-based society, land concerns took precedence over administrative concerns. Cossacks traveled to the *sbor* for a

<sup>56</sup> Volvenko, 350; Ja-Jeong Koo, "Cossack Modernity: Nation-Building in Kuban', 1917-1920," University of California, Berkeley, 2009, 60; McNeal, 4-5, 98, 150; O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants*, 117.

<sup>57</sup> Volvenko, 354; Clark, 169, 211-212, 215; Price, 94; Durand, 33, 42, 60; McNeal, 160; Russian Cossack chieftain, c. 1919-1920, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division; Velychenko, 190-191; O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants*, 117-118; Landsberger, 216-217; Wilton, 307, 310; Serge, 370; Coxwell, 240; A Cossack, Proshnookskara, Russia, 1920, American National Red Cross Photography Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division; Heineman, "The Last Cossack Rebellion," 311.

critical issue or after bringing in the harvest. As men gathered in the *stanitsa* hut, the ataman opened the meeting. Cossack assemblies debated an issue in an attempt to vote impartially for the community's good. Once the discussion climaxed, the ataman rang a bell to take a vote. The Cossacks shifted their positions. Those in favor stood on one side of the room and those against it lined up on the other. By Russian law and Cossack tradition, a two-thirds vote carried the day. When faced with a contentious issue such as land redistribution, the Cossacks recognized the need to preserve harmonious relationships with their neighbors. Although the result could not please everyone, the Cossacks wanted to present their final decision as unanimous. When clearly outvoted, the minority gradually stopped protesting and joined the majority in accepting the group decision. Due to this direct decision-making process embedded in community, the Cossacks had greater participation in their own rule than other peasant groups in Russia.<sup>58</sup>

During the 1870s, the government attempted to enforce the *zemstvo* system to prioritize a nationality and property based electoral process in the western provinces. When Alexander II introduced the *zemstvo* into Cossack territories to universalize Cossack particularism, the Cossacks pushed back with fear and anger against what they saw as an attempt to turn free Cossacks into taxed peasants. In contrast to the *zemstvo* system, the Kuban' host chose not to levy direct personal taxes on its population. For Cossack elites, balanced between their slight military salary and limited income from land rental, *zemstvo* taxes threatened to reduce their already precarious standard of living. The tax also primarily targeted land ownership. A personal tax on land owned corporately added insult to financial loss. The Cossacks blamed the *zemstvo* for placing new restrictions on them, imposing shocking new taxes, and for failing to understand

<sup>58</sup> Heineman, "The Last Cossack Rebellion," 311; Holquist, "From Estate to Ethnos," 91-92; O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants*, 118-120; O'Rourke, *The Cossack*, 144; Volvenko, 348, 352, 61-362.



the Cossack way of life. Bowing to Cossack refusal to pay taxes or delegate their direct voting power, the state permitted the Cossacks to continue to integrate their own military with civil government. Sustained Cossack resistance to the *zemstvo* emphasized the incompatibilities and tensions between local and central government.<sup>59</sup>

As the Cossacks grew more politically insular, they also experienced evolving liberalism and social consciousness. During the late nineteenth century, the army increasingly ordered Cossack soldiers to carry out internal police duties. Although the image of brutal police repression entered the public's experience and imagination, only a tiny percentage of Cossack society, the first four-year units filled with twenty-one to twenty-five-year old men, had to act in this capacity. Prior to 1905, Cossack participation in putting down widespread unrest remained minor. Cossack troops generally stayed on reserve, scattered among estates or villages where authorities suspected that local unrest that might lead to property loss or arson. Despite atrocities committed by various groups during Stenka Razin's and Yemelyan Pugachev's seventeenth and eighteenth-century revolts, Cossack traditions, songs, and stories did not praise knouting women or setting peasant villages on fire. Instead, they saw themselves as heroic warriors defending Mother Russia. The Cossacks' chivalric self-image as honorable soldiers and free men conflicted starkly with the government's reliance on them as an internal control force.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Volvenko, 351, 354, 359-360; Francis W. Wcislo, *Reforming Rural Russia: State, Local Society, and National Politics, 1855-1914* (Princeton University Press, 1990), 281-283; Pearson, 107; Scott J. Seregny, "A Wager on the Peasantry: Anti-Zemstvo Riots, Adult Education and the Russian Village during World War One: Stavropol' Province," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 79, no. 1 (Jan., 2001): 90; Fuller, 240.

\*When the Third Duma introduced a 1911 bill to initiate civil (*zemstvo*) rather than military administration (*voisko*) in the Cossack regions, in accordance with some Don Cossack requests to alleviate economic pressure, Vladimir Sukhomlinov, the Minister of War, blocked the measure. He argued that the Cossacks should retain their "hereditary warrior" status along with their own separate system that integrated local civil and military government from the *stanitsa* to the *voisko* level. Although some in the War Ministry, such as General Nikolai A. Maslakovets, favored turning the Cossacks into a non-military, taxed social estate to alleviate the Cossacks' growing economic, social, and military issues, the War Ministry's stance on the Cossack question perpetuated Cossack estate privileges, insularity, semi-autonomy, and sense of separateness intact.

<sup>60</sup> O'Rourke, "The Don Cossacks," 584-586, 598; Holquist, "From Estate to Ethnos," 91-92; O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants*, 118-120; Janke, 273; O'Rourke, *The Cossack*, 144; Volvenko, 348, 352, 61-362.

This social issue created a tension between the Cossacks' self-image and their primary peacetime use. Forced to face how the government used them to suppress popular protest, the Don and Kuban' Cossacks voiced their growing unhappiness at being forced into police duty. Both Cossacks and peasants often conceptualized a bureaucratic wall separating a good Tsar from a corrupt administrative system. This same wall created a sense of distance and futility that separated the Tsar from the people. Recognition that their progressively primary use to the state lay in crushing resistance to the regime began to demystify the Cossacks' spiritual link between them and the Tsar. When ordered out during the 1905 Revolution, some Cossack units protested that the people had done nothing wrong and that they did not want to be used against them. While most Cossacks remained loyal to the Tsar's person, their active and passive protests highlighted the deepening fractures in their increasingly fragile commitment to the state.<sup>61</sup>

Mobilization for police duty also presented an economic issue. Often occurring during the spring planting or autumn harvest seasons, this duty removed the Cossacks from their villages at critical points in the agrarian cycle. The labor shortage caused economic hardships and resentment. The Cossack situation reached a crisis point during the summer of 1906 when the government called men up to guard landowners' properties in the black earth regions. The army ordered some Cossack units to perform police duties rather than sending them to the Manchurian front to fight in the Russo-Japanese War. Sending troops to pacify an area fraught with agrarian tensions could actually incite revolt. Kuban' Cossacks stationed around gentry estates to protect private property demonstrated growing sympathy with peasants' grievances. The Second Eisk Regiment of Kuban' Cossacks, quartered in Kursk, found themselves separated

<sup>61</sup> McNeal, 1, 5, 221; O'Rourke, "The Don Cossacks during the 1905 Revolution," 584-586, 598; Janke, 273; Holquist, "From Estate to Ethnos," 91-92; O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants*, 118-120; O'Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 144; Kuban' Cossack oral history transcript, schedule A, vol. 26, case no. 511, Slavic Division: Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, 1950, 34; Volvenko, 348, 352, 61-362.

from their officers, divided up into small units, poorly fed, and surrounded by a hostile population. As their women shouldered the heavy field labor back home, the Cossacks observed similar village rhythms and empathized with peasant concerns. Alienated from their land and forced to act as police rather than warriors, the Cossacks became restless, homesick, and discouraged. In these cases, Cossacks reacted as a corporate body against their repressive use. They wrote three anonymous letters to the Kursk governor, begging to be sent back to the Kuban'. Some officers defied the War Ministry's orders and accommodated unhappy Cossack troops. In August 1906, infantry General Ivan A. Karass assumed responsibility for allowing twenty-two forlorn Cossack *sotnias* go home without waiting for their reinforcements to arrive.<sup>62</sup>

By 1906, the Cossacks' use as internal police to protect *pomeshchiki* land loomed against a background of economic pressures, mass mobilization, and resources directed towards the Japanese war effort. As the government required the Cossacks to act in a repressive capacity, this usage demoralized and disheartened many Cossacks. The more that the government used them for repressive actions, the more the Cossacks began to reject the idea that their primary purpose lay in suppressing the state's enemies. Growing self-awareness, historic concepts of *volya*, empathy with peasant grievances, and evolving understanding for non-Cossack perspectives further destabilized their attitudes towards the state. Heavy Cossack deployment in the second and third turns and financial burdens from military service worsened economic conditions at home. The economic ramifications caused by estate obligations during the 1905 Revolution and First World War drove Cossack farms steadily towards collapse.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> O'Rourke, "The Don Cossacks during the 1905 Revolution," 587-588, 596; N. E. Wrangel, 144-145; Coxwell, 145; Kuban' Cossack oral history transcript, Schedule A, vol. 26, case no. 511, Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, Slavic Division: Widener Library, Harvard University, 1950, 35; Fuller, 20; Witte, 77, 138.

<sup>63</sup> Janke, 273; O'Rourke, "The Don Cossacks during the 1905 Revolution," 584-586, 598.

In the 1890s, the government began to recognize the toll that its demands took on Cossack communities. Under Nicholas II, the state organized an investigative commission to identify causes and solutions for Cossack poverty. During several years' research, General Nikolai A. Maslakovets reported that military service's economic and demographic burdens had systematically ruined the Cossacks. Families struggled to provide horses and equipment. Many scrounged necessary cash together by selling off essential produce and livestock. Cossacks could not replenish the depleted home economy due to labor loss from 10 percent of the able-bodied male population absent on peacetime service. When the second and third turn reserves mobilized during wartime, the number rose to thirty percent of the male population. By the First World War, all able-bodied men except for the last reserves left their villages for the Caucasian front.<sup>64</sup>

Weather unpredictability, agricultural practices, and land insufficiencies contributed to severe famines in the Volga, Ukraine, and the Caucasus in 1892. Cossacks leaving for active service recognized that despite their women's capable efforts, their farms would not only fail to produce an agrarian surplus for the northern markets but might not keep their families from hunger that year. In an effort to relieve this service-induced economic disaster, Maslakovets advised turning the Cossacks into a peasant estate. The commission understood that the government would decline to release the Cossacks from fighting its internal and external wars, and the Cossacks would resist surrendering their warrior traditions for a taxed peasant status. In an attempt to ease the pressure that many Cossack households experienced, the government issued 100 rubles to Cossack families that had men called up from the third reserve in October 1905. The War Ministry, however, refused to reduce any military obligations.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> McNeal, 168, 180; Volvenko, 349-350, 354; Janke, 273; O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants*, 71-72, 80; Holquist, "From Estate to Ethnos," 92; Mironov, 445-447; Longworth, 281; O'Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 140, 144.

<sup>65</sup> O'Rourke, "The Don Cossacks during the 1905 Revolution," 585-587; McNeal, 165-166; Carol Leonard, *Agrarian Reform in Russia: The Road from Serfdom* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 239; Volvenko, 360.

### **“The Cossacks seemed to be rooted to their land”**

Economic pressures coincided with Cossack deployment, the struggle against estate boundaries, and conflicted relationships with nonresidents in the Kuban'. When the Russian government opened up immigration to the Caucasus, offering preference to Russian settlers over other ethnic minorities, they attempted to foster Russification and assimilation. The plan backfired. Rather than resolving the land question, immigration caused friction between the newcomers and the Cossacks. The state's attempts to prioritize a national culture, blur ethnic differences, and foster a united Russia created an opposite effect. Russian immigration efforts strengthened Cossack identity. An official commission, sent to investigate land issues in the Caucasus in 1911, discovered conflict rather than compliance. Until the empire's last days, the government largely failed to perceive how its Russification and immigration policies divided the people that it sought to unite and nurtured separatist impulses by enforcing centralization.<sup>66</sup>

Cossack nationalism, emerging during the 1917 revolutions, reflected a desire to expand upon traditional freedoms and retain their estate land. “The Cossacks . . . seemed to be rooted to their land, and held on with their claws and teeth,” Leon Trotsky observed in 1919.<sup>67</sup> The Kuban' Cossack independence movement resulted less from an identity void than historical patterns in Cossack identity, autonomy, and growing resistance to a centralized government. Driven by a commitment to Cossack *volya* and in an attempt to secure their freedoms, the Cossacks moved to establish an independent Kuban' state.

<sup>66</sup> Dana Sherry, “Social Alchemy on the Black Sea Coast, 1860-1865,” *Kritika*, vol. 10, issue 1 (Winter 2009): 9; 9; John W. Slocum, “Who, and When, Were the *Inorodtsy*? The Evolution of the Category of ‘Aliens’ in Imperial Russia,” *The Russian Review*, vol. 57, no. 2 (April 1998): 176; Hodgson, 24; Denikin, 241; Miliukov, 140.

<sup>67</sup> Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography*, 454.

## Chapter III

### Autonomy

#### Prelude to Revolution

Russia's experience in the First World War intensified economic pressures, exacerbated agrarian issues, and deepened social inequalities. Most Kuban' Cossack units that had gone to fight the Turks on the Caucasus border in 1914 had not seen their families for three years. Some Cossacks mobilized in 1910 did not return home for seven years. Defeats, casualties, and political intrigue undermined national morale. Unrest burst into violence. In the capital at Petrograd, hungry and angry crowds waving red flags rioted in the streets. Protestors smashed shop windows, slaughtered policemen, opened the prisons, and alternately cheered and cursed Don and Kuban' Cossack troops riding through the city. During the war, the government routinely stationed Cossack policing units throughout northern cities. In February, some Kuban' Cossack reserves replaced jaded Don Cossack patrols. Fresh from the village and unused to crowd control, the *Kubantsy* demonstrated a soft spot for the women and children protesting the bread shortages. In a move that identified them with the people, the Cossacks fraternized with the crowd and refused to fire on the demonstrators surging through the streets. Cut off from Petrograd at the front and pressured by his staff, Nicholas II abdicated the throne on March 3.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Eliseev, *S Kornilovskim Konnim* (St. Petersburg: Astrel', 2003), 2-4; Joseph V. Fuller and Tyler Dennett, eds., *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1918 Russia* (Washington, D. C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1931), I: 272-273, 287, 294, 365; Engelstein, 223; Smele, 19; Stevani, 103-104; Durand, 58-59; John Pollock, *War and Revolution in Russia: Sketches and Studies* (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1918), 155; Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1996), 339-342; Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime* (New York: Random House, 1994), 2, 16; Allan K. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army: The Old Army and the Soldiers' Revolt, March – April 1917* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 202, 212-215, 222-225.

## “Bread, Peace, and Land”

A Provisional Government formed in the power gap. Led by Premier Aleksandr Kerensky and the Duma ministers that forced the Tsar to abdicate, the Provisional Government proposed to stabilize the situation and continue the war. A Constituent Assembly, formed from elected delegates across the nation, would choose Russia’s future government and decide critical issues such as “bread, peace, and land.” News about the February Revolution trickled through to the Cossacks, leaving them uncertain but committed to their military oath. When he heard about the Tsar’s abdication, one Cossack officer exclaimed, “The Cossacks will feel bad.” “It will be just the opposite,” a Kuban’ Cossack officer retorted. “It will make life easier for everyone.”<sup>69</sup>

The front lines began to disintegrate. Soldiers’ councils or *soviets* took over the army that spring. Many soldiers discarded discipline. They attacked officers on sight, tore off their shoulder-straps, and often killed them. When the summer offensive began, officers pleaded with their troops to fight. As the lines collapsed and soldiers refused to advance, some units composed of trained combat officers mounted charges alone. Anarchy reigned in the Cossack regions as deserters poured back through the countryside. Kerensky attempted to reassure the Cossacks by withdrawing troops from the area. The government pulled steady troops back to fight revolutionary activity, baring entire sections on the eastern front. Distant from the centers of power, the Kuban’ region remained more stable in these early months. In Ekaterinodar, soldiers’ *soviets*, urban workers, and nonresidents soon seized control over local administration.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Eliseev, *Kornilovskim*, 5.

<sup>70</sup> Denikin, *Russian Turmoil*, 242; Sokolov, 18; Gorky, n. 426, 429; Eliseev, *Kornilovskim*, 14; Tschebotarioff, 222; Kirill Protopopov, “Kuban’ People’s Republic,” *The Cinderella Philatelist*, vol. 52, no. 1 (January 2012): 9; Littaur, 258, 261-262, 270; Étienne Antonelli and Charles A. Carroll, *Bolshevik Russia* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1920), 104-105; Great Britain Foreign Office, eds., *A Collection of Reports on Bolshevism in Russia* (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1919), 50, 93; Kamyshansky, 188-191, 238; Fuller and Dennett, II: 77; Fedotoff-White, 182-183.

\*Soldiers’ *soviets* or councils, designed to establish soldiers’ rights, appeared in the Russian Army after the February Revolution. Although Bolshevik agitators and Bolshevized soldiers infiltrated and radicalized these

In the early days, the Cossacks stood apart. “We fell into an enchanted circle,” Colonel Feodor Eliseev remembered.<sup>71</sup> While the Kuban’ Cossacks generally demonstrated political unity, most only vaguely understood the shifting politics occurring at a distance. In a period of massive social change and upheaval, many welcomed the revolution as a chance to recover their traditional independence. The old forms of democracy retained within the informal states represented by the Cossack hosts created a basis to formalize Kuban’ self-government. Following the monarchy’s collapse, the Cossacks convened a Cossack Congress in Petrograd. They declared their determination to keep order until the Constituent Assembly met.<sup>72</sup>

The rising Bolshevik party attempted to disrupt Cossack solidarity by dividing them between elite and peasant. Soviet agitators branded Cossack officers as counterrevolutionaries and appealed to common Cossacks to rise against them and assist Soviet power. Armed soldiers in trucks rumbled into Cossack camps. They pressured them to join revolutionary rallies and arrest their officers. Many Cossacks distrusted the soldiers’ intentions and refused to arrest their officers. When the soldiers demanded, “Point out the worthless officers and we ourselves will arrest them!” most remained silent.<sup>73</sup> A few discontents seized the opportunity to get rid of unpopular officers and elect new ones. Cossack soldiers’ meetings typically centered on economic rather than political concerns. During the unrest that gripped the country, a psychological shift also swept over Cossack regiments as men began to demand pay for years of service. Few Kuban’ Cossacks ended up attending rallies. In many regiments, not a single Cossack wore a revolutionary red bow. For the most part, applying Marxist class theories to the

meetings during the summer of 1917, they remained separate entities from the Bolshevik (Soviet) party prior to the October Revolution. The Bolsheviks remained a political party minority, and did not gain power until they toppled the Provisional Government in a coup on the night of October 25/November 7, 1917.

<sup>71</sup> Eliseev, *Kornilovskim*, 14-16.

<sup>72</sup> Denikin, *Russian Turmoil*, 242; Sokolov, 18.

<sup>73</sup> Eliseev, *Kornilovskim*, 14.



complex Russian social system failed to produce definite divisions along class lines.<sup>74</sup>

Although the estate system ended, the Cossacks continued to fulfill their military orders. They restored order to the railways and guarded property, industrial centers, and communication lines. Despite discipline and determination, Cossack units constituted too few horsemen scattered along a 1,500-mile-long front and thousands of miles of railway lines. As military and social disintegration continued, the Kuban' host struggled to reestablish order in the area. They begged the Don Cossacks to spare a few *sotnias* to help them since it had become "impossible to breathe for comrades."<sup>75</sup> In July, the Cossacks helped put down the Bolshevik uprising at Kronstadt. These activities shifted the Soviets' opposition onto the Cossacks. The Provisional Government also began to regard the Cossacks' actions as counterrevolutionary behavior. While they supported the government, the Cossacks kept hoping for a decision that would grant them full legal rights to the land given to the *voisko* under the estate system.<sup>76</sup>

### **The Cossack Question**

The critical "Cossack question" centered on land. After reading Communist newspapers and visiting a few meetings, the Cossacks understood the threat to their survival if the Bolshevik party seized power. In late August 1917, the Soviets announced their intentions regarding private property ownership in a Peasant Mandate. The mandate would not only prohibit Cossacks from privately using *voisko* land but also prevent them from buying, selling, renting or mortgaging it. This meant that Cossacks who worked their way up in the ranks to elite status and leased land not only lost lifetime land ownership but could no longer earn any money from renting it out. An

<sup>74</sup> Rieber, 32; Denikin 246; Sokolov, 5-6, 9-10, 13; F. I. Eliseev, *Kazaki na Kavkazskom Fronte*, 151-152, 158, 160; Kamyshansky, 13; Tschepotarioff, *Russia, My Native Land*, 222; Eliseev, *Kornilovskim*, 23-24, 92-93.

<sup>75</sup> Denikin, 243.

<sup>76</sup> Sokolov, 13; Fedotoff-White, 182-183.

additional clause that awarded property to the people that worked it meant that the *inogorodnye* now felt justified in their claims to Cossack land that they currently rented. The Soviets also ordered public and private properties expropriated and turned into workers' communal property. On October 26, a land decree issued by the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets confirmed that "landed proprietorship is abolished . . . without any compensation."<sup>77</sup> In a move that echoed a new type of serfdom, the sweeping property socialization included estates, forests, rivers, livestock, stables, farm implements, orchards, vineyards, and natural resources. Now the *pomeshchiki* would not own large estates and exact serfs' labor dues. Instead, the Bolsheviks proposed to nationalize land and maximize production in the people's name. Cossack peasants who opposed land expropriation still had to wait for the *voisko* to distribute land to them individually. Although the October 26 decree targeted large landowners and permitted "working" Cossacks to keep their land, most Kuban' Cossacks saw the new land mandates as a threat to both to their corporate *voisko* property and the Cossack people.<sup>78</sup>

Throughout the summer, the Provisional Government continued to waver on the "Cossack question." In a move to appease both the Cossacks and the *inogorodnye*, the government declared that both groups could claim "historical rights" to the same land. This indecision increased tensions by making the Cossacks uneasy and encouraging the nonresidents' unofficial claims to the land. The government refused to declare the Cossacks' continued rights to their land or permit them to elect their own *Nakaznyi Ataman*. Rather than risking alienating

<sup>77</sup> Land Decree, Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets, 8 November (26 October), 1917, Section I - Section III, in Yuri Akhapiin, ed., *First Decrees of Soviet Power* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), 23-25.

<sup>78</sup> *Izvestia Vserossiiskogo Soveta Krestyanskikh Deputatov*, no. 88, Section I, 19 August 1917; Decree of the Council of People's Commissars on Monopoly State Control of Farm Machines and Implements, 25 November 1917, Akhapiin, 48; Basic Decree on the Abolition of Inheritance, Issued by the All-Russia Central Executive Committee, Decrees, vol 2, 187-190, Akhapiin, 129; 26 October 1917, Soviet Decrees, vol. I, 17-20, 26; Declaration of the Rights of the Working and Exploited People Adopted by the Third All-Russia Congress of Soviets, 25 (12) January, 1918, Akhapiin, 76-78; Janke, 288-289.

either the Cossacks or the nonresidents, the government left it to the future Constituent Assembly's discretion to solve this agrarian puzzle. At the All Russian Peasant Congress, Victor Chernov, Minister of Agriculture and Social Revolutionary party member, declared that since the Cossack host held large land tracts, they would have to turn over portions to the nonresidents.<sup>79</sup> Cossack delegates then went to the Soviet meetings to hear what they had to say. They listened unhappily to speeches encouraging anarchy and approving land confiscation. The Cossacks returned to the Cossack Congress to report that the Soviet was "no place for them."<sup>80</sup>

The "Cossack question" dragged on towards autumn. Although the government planned to relocate to Moscow to stay closer to the Cossack epicenters, they failed to prioritize convening the Constituent Assembly. The government also refused to betray the revolution by dealing decisively with the Soviet threat. Instead, Kerensky spent the critical summer months mingling with the Soviets and negotiating with the emerging Bolshevik leader, Vladimir Ilych Lenin.<sup>81</sup>

The Cossacks saw no place for themselves in this new revolutionary world. While they backed the Provisional Government, they did not welcome Kerensky's flirtation with the Bolsheviks. Many Cossacks, while loyal to the former Tsar, also did not want to return to autocracy. The radical socialist and anti-Cossack speeches voiced in Soviet meetings continued to alienate the Cossacks. The Soviets' intentions to eliminate the Cossacks as a caste only strengthened Kuban' Cossack corporate identity. The public remained uncertain about the Cossacks' true allegiance: for or against the revolution. No one heard the Cossacks' voice as a group since they had not clearly stated their political position at this time. By the time that the All-Russia Cossack Congress met, even the more liberal Cossacks could not tolerate the

<sup>79</sup> Janke, 274; Antonelli, 86; Wilton, 133; Andriewsky, 35.

<sup>80</sup> Wilton, 133.

<sup>81</sup> General M. V. Alexiev, to Lieutenant General M. K. Dietrichs in Gorky, 394.

Bolshevik agenda. At Ekaterinodar in July, every Kuban' Cossack socialist at the District Executive Committee walked out of the meeting and formed their own *voisko soviet*. For the next several months, the Cossacks balanced between the state and the revolution in the quest for the future of their estate privileges.<sup>82</sup>

### **“We Are Cossacks, We Don't Need Parties”**

In the regions where imperial power gradually eroded Kuban' Cossack freedoms and autonomous traditions remained deeply embedded in cultural memory and local government. In March 1917, a Cossack assembly met in Ekaterinodar to discuss their future. They recognized an identity shift following the end of tsarist military obligations but argued that they held an identity apart from the estate system. They decided that no matter what happened, the Cossack people would always survive. When Colonel Orekhov, a Black Sea Cossack lawyer, advised a group of North Caucasus Cossack leaders that they needed to secede immediately, mobilize a Kuban' Army, and secure their borders, many felt reluctant to take such radical steps at that time.<sup>83</sup>

Many Kuban' Cossacks, descended from old Zaporizhian bloodlines, welcomed the opportunity to openly rule themselves again. When General Mikhail P. Babich, the Russian *Nakaznyi Ataman*, quit his post, a Kuban' council (*Rada*) sprang up and began electing atamans in defiance of old tsarist restrictions. The election campaign created lively competition between the Black Sea Kuban' Cossacks (*chornovtsy*) and the Cossacks on the Terek line (*lineitsy*). Terek Cossack A. P. Filimonov won the supreme ataman post on October 25, 1917. Filimonov worked to integrate Cossack self-government traditions with efforts to secure their old estate privileges.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Sokolov, 13; Denikin, 243.

<sup>83</sup> Miliukov, 140; Rieber, 31; Andriewsky, 29.

<sup>84</sup> Rieber, 35; Wilton, 316; Marschak, 26; Ruler of a Cossack Republic, Russia, 1920, American National Red Cross Photography Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

In the past, the Cossacks generally held themselves aloof from politics. During the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, the Cossacks experienced growing social awareness. Despite political inexperience and Cossack-centrism, some Cossacks began to observe and empathize with the soldiers', workers', and peasants' social inequalities. They understood that the non-Cossacks in the Kuban' had the right to a voice in local politics. While they resisted giving up host land, the Cossacks met to discuss land issues and electoral participation with the nonresidents.<sup>85</sup>

Some Provisional Government members such as Aleksandr Guchkov called for a pan-Cossack congress that would include Cossacks across the former Russian Empire. Unlike the diverse liberal and conservative parties that intersected the Russian political scene, the Kuban' Cossacks saw no need for different parties. "We are Cossacks, we don't need parties!" one man declared at the Ekaterinodar assembly in March.<sup>86</sup> Although different shades of political opinion existed, the Cossacks had experience resolving their differences as a community through the *sbor* forum. Even when all did not agree on an issue, the Cossacks endeavored to reach a consensus after an open discussion. As national loyalties shifted between tsarist, Kadet, Bolshevik, socialist, and ethnic political movements, it became clear that the Cossacks and the Bolsheviks remained polarized. People found it difficult to make up their minds about the Cossacks. Political discussions reflected the belief that the Cossacks, despite their liberal leanings, tended to fall into the counterrevolutionary category. "Well, on one hand there are the Bolsheviks," a non-Cossack delegate to the Kiev Cossack Congress mused, "and on the other there are Cossacks." Another

<sup>85</sup> Janke, 283; Andriewsky, 29, 34; Koo, "From an Estate to a Cossack Nation," *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 66, no. 10 (2014): 1649-1650; Stevani, 87-88; Wilton, 315; Koo, "Universalizing Cossack Particularism," 1-2; Antonelli, 104; Eliseev, *Kornilovskim*, 1-2; Denikin, 242, 244; Fedotoff-White, 182-183.

<sup>86</sup> Andriewsky, 35.

member demanded, “So, what are you going to do? Send one bullet into the Bolsheviks and the other into the Cossacks? You have to decide.”<sup>87</sup>

The Kuban’ Rada demonstrated growing impatience with the state’s vacillation on the Bolshevik issue, the delay in calling the Constituent Assembly, and responding to Cossack needs. By the Moscow Conference on August 12, Don Cossack Ataman A. M. Kaledin agreed that they needed to develop a united Cossack front to resolve the Cossack question and prevent Russians from infringing on Cossack life. Following Kaledin’s lead, the Cossack Council decided to make its corporate voice heard. “The time for words has passed,” they declared. “Our patience is exhausted. It remains for us to accomplish the great work of salvation.”<sup>88</sup> On October 3, delegates from the Cossack Council met with Vice Premier Aleksandr Konovolev. During the meeting, the Cossacks announced that they wanted to form a separate voting bloc in the Constituent Assembly rather than integrate a few delegates into the general elections.<sup>89</sup>

The government agreed. As the state’s authority weakened, Cossack government on the Kuban’ strengthened. Under the prerevolutionary form of Cossack self-rule, each *voisko* district had a local administration headed by an ataman. In September, Don, Kuban’, and Terek atamans met at Ekaterinodar to develop a strategy to unify South Russia. In the next few days, the Kuban’ Rada moved fast. By October 7, they voted to create a sweeping South-East Alliance. The South-East Union included the Cossack hosts, Caucasian Mountain peoples, and free peoples of the steppes (*Iugo-vostochnyi soyuz kazach’ikh voisk, gortsev Kavkaza, i vol’nykh narodov stepei*).

The alliance connected the *voisko* territories bordering the Don region and the North Caucasus in

<sup>87</sup> Denikin, 242, 244; Eliseev, *Kornilovskim*, 1-2; Janke, 274; Fedotoff-White, 182; Holquist, “From Estate to Ethnos,” 91-92; Volvenko, 348; 361-362; Heineman, “The Last Cossack Rebellion,” 311; O’Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants*, 118-120; O’Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 144; Antonelli, 104; Wilton, 315; Marschak, 26.

<sup>88</sup> Wilton, 314.

<sup>89</sup> Denikin, 242; Gorky, 396; Wilton, 314.

a chain of Cossack republics. Encouraged by the Provisional Government's declaration that the future Russia would function as a republic, the South-East Alliance resolved to protect the "healthy parts of the state" stretching from the Don and Kuban' to the Terek and Astrakhan.<sup>90</sup> Designed to expand Cossack ethnic identity into a nationalist movement, the alliance vowed to defend a democratic government, to continue the war with the allies, and fight revolution at home. The unification terms guaranteed absolute autonomy to all the nationalities and people groups within the alliance regions.<sup>91</sup>

### **The South-East Alliance**

This concept of a loose union joining the Cossack *voiskos* across Russia did not emerge for the first time in 1917. During the early twentieth century, Kuban' Cossack leaders worked actively to build the foundations for an independent Cossack state. The South-East Alliance aimed to provide a strong legislative and administrative framework to preserve order, combat intrusion in local affairs, and to provide a stable political climate to convene the Constituent Assembly. The Cossacks believed that only the Constituent Assembly had the power to decide the country's political future. The South-East Alliance played into the concept of Russia's future as a democratic federative republic. Mutually supportive and administratively autonomous, the loose territorial union allowed the Cossacks, mountaineers, and steppe peoples to retain complete control over their own rule. Rather than forming a single sovereign state, each local government remained an independent entity. The union intended to support local administration, legislation, and the justice system, while resolving social and economic issues.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Gorky, 396.

<sup>91</sup> Sokolov, 2, 31; Brovkin, 221; Gorky, 142, 396; Andriewsky, 35.

<sup>92</sup> "Korolenko, *Kuban'skie Kazaki*, 1-2, 5, 9-10, 41-42; Janke, 275-277; Gorky, 142; Sokolov, 2, 31-32; Marschak, 32.

The *Soyuz* alliance, established at the Second Joint Conference in Vladikavkaz, the Terek Cossack host's capital, signaled the Cossacks' intention to resolve the "Cossack question" for themselves while maintaining peripheral government support. After a five-day conference, the Cossacks, Caucasians, Kalmyks, and other indigenous peoples agreed to a treaty on October 20. The Ural and Orenburg Siberian Cossacks later joined the unification project. The *Soyuz* then moved to legal ratification by the joint governments' *Krug*, *Rada*, and *medjilis* legislatures. The Vladikavkaz treaty fostered support and independence among the Cossacks and their indigenous neighbors. The South-East Alliance planned for these independent North Caucasus states to form autonomous republics in a future Russian federation.<sup>93</sup>

If the unification treaty had succeeded, the Kuban' Cossacks would have formed one link in a chain of federated states that consolidated political administration in local hands. The South-East Alliance enjoyed widespread local popularity. It demonstrated the Cossack leaders' commitment to their own freedom and unrestricted independence for the diverse people groups living in the North Caucasus and left-bank Ukraine. During the Civil War, the anti-Bolsheviks refused to acknowledge minority groups as nationalities separate from the Russian state. Anti-Bolshevik authorities fought bitterly with the Rada to force them to acknowledge General Anton Denikin's supreme leadership over the Cossack host. While the Rada and the Caucasian highlanders agreed to withhold grain, oil, and coal from the Soviet north, anti-Bolshevik leaders interfered in these efforts with drastic results. Although they continued to explore ways to collaborate, cooperation between the Cossacks and the Caucasians became increasingly difficult and dangerous. The alliance lasted until destroyed by Soviet occupation in 1920.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Marschak, 32; Gor'ky, 142; Sokolov, 2, 31-32; Janke, 275-277.

<sup>94</sup> Carpatho-Ukraine: A People in Search of their Identity," in Ivan L. Rudnytsky, *Essays in Modern Ukrainian History* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1987), 360; Knox, 707; Sokolov, 31; Janke, 277-278; Gor'ky, 142.



During the autumn, the Bolshevik party agitated through rallies, propaganda, and stirring up strikes among soldiers, sailors, and workers. As they kept a fragile control on the situation in Petrograd, the Cossacks wanted to suppress the Bolshevik threat. Kerensky refused. When a group of officers led by Siberian Cossack General Lavr Kornilov urged Kerensky to dissolve the *soviets*, stamp out the Bolshevik revolt, and convene the Constituent Assembly, Kerensky imprisoned them as traitors in the Bykhov fortress. Alienated by Kerensky's treatment, the Cossacks turned increasingly insular. Kuban' leaders pulled away to protect their autonomy. By late October, the Rada issued a Kuban' constitution created by Makarenko. On October 25, the same day that the Cossacks elected Ataman Filimonov, the Bolsheviks staged a coup at the Winter Palace that overthrew the Provisional Government. In November, the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies legitimized the coup and elected Vladimir Lenin to head the new government. The Bolshevik government claimed to exist only until the Constituent Assembly voted on the people's choice for a new administration. Despite intimidation tactics, the Bolsheviks failed to gain the popular majority vote at the Constituent Assembly on January 19, 1918. In response, the Bolsheviks dissolved the Constituent Assembly. The Soviets established a Central Executive Committee in the wake of the Constituent Assembly's dissolution. The Bolshevik power seizure and radical new laws triggered the first stirrings of civil war. As an anti-Bolshevik Volunteer Army sprang up in Cossack regions in the Ukraine, the Soviets hurried to prevent attempts to restore the former Russian Empire.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>95</sup> "Decree of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee on the Dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, "19 (6) January 1918, Akhapiin, 48, 74-75; Esther Mann-Kingston, "Problems of Order and Revolution: Lenin and the Peasant Question in March and April 1917," *Russian History*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1979): 49-51; "Resolution on V. I. Lenin's Report on Foreign Policy, Adopted by the Joint Meeting of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee and the Moscow Soviet," 14 May 1918, Akhapiin, 136; Smele, 34; Miliukov, 165; S. P. Melgunov, Sergei G. Pushkarev, and James S. Beaver, eds., *The Bolshevik Seizure of Power, Kak Bol'sheviki zakhvatili vlast': Oktiabr'skii perevorot 1917 goda* (Santa Barbara, California and Oxford, England: American Bibliographical Center Clio-Press, 1972), 64, 167; Wilton, 313-314, 316; Knox, 699, 705, 718-719, 723; Mazour, 434; Denikin, 242; Janke, 274.

### **“You, Kuban’, are Our Motherland”: From a Cossack *Sbor* to a Cossack State**

As the Bolshevik state consolidated power, the tight military administration that characterized the Kuban’ Cossack host offered the Kuban’ leaders a political advantage. In the early revolutionary days, most Cossacks did not feel an immediate need to secede from Russia. At the same time, they moved quickly to elect atamans and establish a central Rada. The Rada acted as a congress for the entire Kuban’ population. In the Rada, as in the local assembly, each individual had the right to voice his opinion freely. The Bolshevik takeover interfered with the South-East Alliance’s plans to provide a stable foundation for the Constituent Assembly and ignited Cossack separatist resistance. Faced with estate disintegration, *inogorodnye* hostility, and the opportunity to pursue independence plans, the Cossacks expanded the *voisko* government that previously handled special Cossack affairs into a wider political organization.<sup>96</sup>

Three months after the October Revolution, the Soviets abolished private land ownership and ordered all propertied classes disarmed to prevent resistance. The new laws also installed one Soviet deputy for every one hundred people in *stanitsas* with populations under 10,000. Depending on the Cossack community’s size, the Soviets planted between 3 and 50 Soviet deputies per village. The Bolsheviks’ political mouthpiece, Sovnarkom, released a decree “To the Entire Nation” that targeted Cossack areas as hostile zones. A month later, the Soviets placed the Cossack lands under martial law. The Soviets ordered local commissars to eliminate these “enemies of the people” without waiting for orders from above. Following these *carte blanche* guidelines, the Bolsheviks refused to negotiate with captured Cossacks. This hardline policy initiated a surge in terror against the Cossacks in the Don and Kuban’ areas. While official

<sup>96</sup> O’Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants*, 118-120; Holquist, “From Estate to Ethnos,” 91; O’Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 144.

Soviet propaganda sought to lure Cossacks to the Bolshevik side, the state's practical policy offered a harsh reality for the Cossack people. Bolshevik decossackization plans proposed to enroll Cossacks in the Soviet army, abolish compulsory military service in favor of short-term training, provide state-funded uniforms and equipment, eliminate guard duties, military reviews, and summer camps, and grant Cossacks the ability to change their place of residence.<sup>97</sup>

Despite the military and economic burdens that the Soviet reforms proposed to lift, most Cossacks did not welcome attempts to strip away their military identity. After efforts to permanently divide the Cossacks along class lines, the Bolsheviks refused to recognize that their solidarity derived from ethnic identity rather than from an artificial estate system. While the Soviets saw the Cossacks as capable military opponents, they fought to break the ethnic unity that bound the Cossack elite, middle class, and peasants together. In his reports from 1919, Leon Trotsky, the commander of the Red Army, admitted that the Cossacks displayed an inconvenient, un-Marxist solidarity between working class and nobility. This general unity permeated Cossack society at every level. Trotsky interpreted this bond as a reactionary remnant of the estate system rather than evidence of ethnic identity. He argued that the Soviets needed to dismantle Cossack identity to destroy this commonality and bring Cossack peasants over to the Bolshevik side. A popular Soviet leaflet appealing to the "Brother Cossacks!" resulted in comparatively few Red Army volunteers. When a Russian *inogorodnye* publicly insulted the Cossacks during a hot debate on land and government in Ekaterinodar in 1917, the cry, "Brother Cossacks!" brought every man to his feet. In an act of complete unity, every Kuban' Cossack filed out of the room.<sup>98</sup> Attempts to divide the Cossacks along class lines and recruit them to the Bolshevik cause largely

<sup>97</sup> Antonelli, 106.

<sup>98</sup> Andriewsky, 38.

failed due to a collective ethnic rather than a class-based identity.<sup>99</sup>

In an attempt to divert support from the anti-Bolshevik nationalist cause, the Soviets offered Russia's diverse people groups the right to "free self-determination."<sup>100</sup> This encouraged national minorities to establish independent states. Despite Soviet promises for self-determination, Trotsky's speech to the Seventh All-Russian Congress of Soviets made it clear that the Soviets would not permit the Ukraine and North Caucasus to remain autonomous. Both regions, Trotsky emphasized, would eventually become part of a federative Soviet republic.<sup>101</sup>

The Kuban' Cossacks already had a separatist state underway. The Kuban' and Don Cossack governments refused to recognize the authority of the Council of People's Commissars. Rather than forming part of a federation of Soviet states as the Bolsheviks hoped, the Kuban' Cossacks fought to secure free government with an embryonic state deeply opposed to Soviet authority. In response, the Bolsheviks declared war on the Cossack regions. The Soviets commandeered village councils, took over city administration, and increased propaganda to sway young Cossack *frontoviki* exhausted by the war to the Bolshevik side.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Serge, *Year One of the Russian Revolution*, 121-122; Leon Trotsky, "Our Southern Front," 11 May 1919, in *How the Revolution Armed: The Military Writings and Speeches of Leon Trotsky* (London: New Park Publications, 1979), II: 252-253; Mazour, 350, 359; Roy Medvedev, Sergei Starikov, and Guy Daniels, trans., *Philip Mironov and the Russian Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 47-48.

<sup>100</sup> Decree on Naturalization, Issued by the All-Russia Central Executive Committee, Akhapiin, 113; Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars Pertaining to the Proclamation of the Ukrainian Republic an Independent Federated Soviet Republic, Akhapiin, 15; Resolution of the Third All-Russia Congress of Soviets Endorsing the Nationalities Policy on the Soviet Government, January 28, 1918, Akhapiin, 85.

<sup>101</sup> Resolution of the Third Congress of Soviets on the Fundamentals of the FSFSR Constitution, Akhapiin, 83; Constitution (Fundamental Law) of the R. S. F. S. R. Adopted by the Fifth All-Russia Congress of Soviets, Chapter XI, "Soviets of Deputies", Akhapiin, 163; Constitution, Part IV, Chapter XIII, Akhapiin, 165; Decree on Peace, Issued by the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets November 8 (26 October), 1917, Akhapiin, 20-21; Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia, 14 (2) November 1917, Akhapiin, 32; Fedyashin, lxxxvii; Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): 420; Trotsky, "Military Construction Report," in *How the Revolution Armed*, 35.

<sup>102</sup> "Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars Pertaining to the Proclamation of the Ukrainian Republic an Independent Federated Soviet Republic," Akhapiin, 115; Andriewsky, 29; "Resolution on the Land Question of the Cossack Congress, June 15, 1917," in Kerensky and Browder, eds., II: 595-596; Miliukov, 141; Denikin, 242; Smele, 33; Eliseev, *Kornilovskim*, 51; Fedotoff-White, 182; Kamyshansky, 155, 161.

Forging their way home through angry crowds and hostile villages, the Cossacks maintained strict order and resisted all attempts to disarm them. At train stations, mobs of aggressive soldiers tried to engage the Cossacks in revolutionary discussions. The Cossacks shied away from them. The widespread social disorder made the Cossacks uneasy, tight-knit, and anxious to get home. The Cossack relaxed when he stepped onto Kuban' earth. His obligations to the state fell from his shoulders. Full-fledged Cossack nationalism reasserted itself for the first time since the Zaporizhian Hetmanate supported Pugachev's rebellion.<sup>103</sup>

As war erupted in the Don countryside, anti-Bolshevik generals, officers, and cadets gathered a Volunteer Army to liberate Russia. The Soviets developed a Red Army backed by industrial power and invaded the south to crush the counterrevolution. In a war along a borderless front, the Don Cossacks began the first wave of uprisings that secured their capital at Novocherkassk north of Ekaterinodar as a base for military operations.<sup>104</sup>

### **The Kuban' People's Republic**

When the Cossacks initiated state-building in late 1917, they revived the remnants of the old Cossack Hetmanate government that existed within the Cossack administrative structure into the 1840s. The Cossacks' earlier independence efforts, led by officers from the Cossack nobility, paralleled larger nineteenth-century nationalist movements occurring in Poland and Hungary. In December, the Cossacks created a dual legislative Rada and Military Council. Rada chairman Nikolai S. Ryabovol opened the Military Council's first session. Ryabovol gripped his listeners with strong emotional language and historical memory that reminded the Cossacks how the state

<sup>103</sup> Kamyshansky, 155, 161; Janke, 287; Eliseev, *Kornilovskim*, 108-109; Fedotoff-White, 182-183; Eliseev, *Istoriia*, 19; Marschak, 26; Tuganov, 206, 228; Victor Serge, *Year One*, 392; Sokolov, 22; Denikin, 246.

<sup>104</sup> Bogaevsky, 29; Denikin, 243, 315; Hodgson, 32; Kenez, *Red Attack, White Resistance*, 123, 126-127, 131-132; Erich Ludendorff, *My War Memories* (London: Hutchinson, 1919), II:622; M. G. Drozdovskii, *Dnevnik* (Berlin: Otto Kirkner' and Company, 1923), 431-432; Sokolov, 3, 5-6.

sought to use them for its own purposes: “The tsars wanted to make us murderers, they wanted that when the convenient time came for the liberation of Ukraine, we would crush that freedom with our own hands.”<sup>105</sup> The Rada refused to recognize the Bolshevik Council of People’s Commissars’ legitimacy or authority. In return, the Soviets outlawed the Kuban’ as an insurgent region. Two days after the Rada proclaimed its constitution, Trotsky sent the Red Army south to “wipe off the face of the earth the counterrevolutionary rebellion of the Cossack Generals.”<sup>106</sup>

The Kuban’ Rada remained the only effective governing body in the area. Since the Cossacks pursued state-building in an ethnically and politically heterogeneous region, each group’s goals complicated the Rada’s reform movements. One third of Kuban’ industry and half of the North Caucasus’ small proletarian population lived in Ekaterinodar. The Kuban’s key social and economic problem centered on land. The Rada soon found its attempts at internal stabilization and reform impeded by nonresident demands. Despite the Cossacks’ and Russian settlers’ complicated relationship, the Rada extended the right to vote both to the Caucasian mountain peoples and the *inogorodnye*. The Rada also promulgated a reform program that included non-Cossacks and expanded some of their rights.<sup>107</sup>

In Ekaterinodar, the Bolsheviks and the *inogorodnye* dominated local *soviet* councils. The Bolsheviks ran propaganda in local newspapers during regional elections while Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries jockeyed to create an anti-Bolshevik bloc. Fueled by their success in the Executive Committee, the Soviets demanded that each worker receive 14 acres in the countryside. Workers would live on the land rent-free. The Soviets expanded their revolutionary

<sup>105</sup> “The Role of Ukraine in Modern History,” in Rudnytsky, 20; Stephen Velychenko, *State-Building in Revolutionary Ukraine: A Comparative Study of Governments and Bureaucrats, 1917-1922* (University of Toronto Press, 2011), 15, 35-36; Sokolov, 8.

<sup>106</sup> Antonelli, 70; Trotsy, *How the Revolution Armed*, 242-243; Janke, 283; Koo, “From an Estate to a Cossack Nation,” 1650; Ja-Jeong Koo, “Universalizing Cossack Particularism,” 1-2; Andriewsky, 29; Protopopov, 9; Gorky, 142; “Drahominov as Political Theorist,” in Rudnytsky, 238.

<sup>107</sup> Brovkin, 225; Genrikhovna and Bratolyubova, 10-13; Sokolov, 8.

utopia to stipulate that workers no longer had to pay for housing, water, overdue rents, or other unpaid bills. Instead, the “nonworking” middle class would cover these expenses.<sup>108</sup>

The Cossacks recognized that the *inogorodnye* deserved to have a voice in local affairs, but political polarization and the land rights conflict sowed seeds of division along anti-Bolshevik and pro-Soviet lines. Encouraged by the upheaval, the nonresidents stopped paying rent and demanded that the Cossacks surrender the land to them. The *inogorodnye* also called for the abolishment of Cossack land and tax privileges. The mood grew threatening and the relationship spiraled. Initially conciliatory, the Cossacks began to fear a true democratic process that would allow the *inogorodnye* to run over them. At local meetings, Soviets and nonresidents cheered Lenin and Trotsky. Others shouted that the Cossacks drank the proletarians’ blood. The Cossacks also grew excited, interrupted the nonresidents, and called for recesses when a vote did not go their way. When a nonresident attacked Makarenko for maliciously resisting the *zemstvo*, Sultan Shakhim-Girei, leading the Caucasian delegates, sprang to defend Makarenko. After a three-day debate, the quarreling members broke up into smaller groups to try to come up with a plan to develop a viable local administration. The outsiders’ demand for land socialization drove the Circassians to side with the Cossacks. In the Don region, relations between the Cossacks and nonresidents shifted between empathy and hostility. At Vladikavkaz, the Terek Cossacks and the *inogorodnye* joined forces in a full-scale war against the Ingush and Chechen peoples.<sup>109</sup>

The war in the Kuban’ emerged primarily between the Cossacks and the nonresidents. Since nonresident partisans attacked Cossack villages, some Rada members wanted to expel or

<sup>108</sup> Genrikhovna and Bratolyubova, 11-12; Brovkin, 225.

<sup>109</sup> D. E. Skobtsov, *Tri goda revoliutsii i grazhdanskoï voïny na Kubani* (Paris: Alon, 1961), 5-16; A. P. Filimonov, “Kubantsy,” in G. Z. Ioffe, ed., *Beloe Delo* (Mosow: Nauka, 1989), II:75; Gorky, 146; Aten, 140; Sokolov, 8; Andriewsky, 38; Wilton, 313; Borisenko, I: 23, 108; Kenez, *Red Attack, White Resistance*, 40-44; I. Aleksandr F. Kerensky and Robert Paul Browder, *The Russian Provisional Government, 1917: Documents* (California: Stanford University Press, 1961), 1478-1480; Marschak, 33.

execute suspected Bolshevik *inogorodnye*. The Rada president, L. L. Bych, toned the meeting down and made it clear that the government would not deport or kill anyone. At the same time, the Cossacks voted to ensure that only Cossack children attended *stanitsa* schools.<sup>110</sup>

As local Soviet power swelled, social destabilization and property seizure appeared imminent. The Rada decided to root out the Bolshevik threat from the district. Appealing to the First Caucasian Native Cavalry Division for support, the Cossacks, Mensheviks, and Social Revolutionaries united in a massive effort to eject the Bolsheviks from the capital. On the night of November 1, the Cossacks and supporting forces disarmed the Soviets throughout the city. Then, on February 16, the Rada declared the Kuban' People's Republic a free state.<sup>111</sup>

By late winter, the Don capital at Novocherkassk and the Rostov center fell into Bolshevik hands. Forced to retreat, the Volunteer White Army under generals Lavr Kornilov, Mikhail Alexeev, and Anton Denikin fought their way south through icy and volatile conditions to reach the Kuban'. The road between Rostov and Novocherkassk dissolved. Harassed and outnumbered, the Volunteer Army broke through to the North Caucasus. At the border to the Kuban', the Don Cossacks under General Piotr Popov refused to enter the Kuban' Cossacks' sovereign territory. On the struggle south, the Volunteers did not know if the Kuban' Cossacks would support them. Even before the Volunteer Army reached the Kuban', Rada president L. L. Bych warned the Cossacks that joining the Whites would result in subjection to a military dictatorship. He urged the Cossacks to defend their own land rather than joining the larger anti-Bolshevik movement that would subject them to outside control and result in a "new absorption

<sup>110</sup> Sokolov, 29-30; Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1919-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 177.

<sup>111</sup> Denikin, 243; Hodgson, 30; Sokolov, 2, 13; Summary of information from the press of the occupied provinces of Department 1 of Section 1 of the Registration Directorate of the field staff of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic, 26/27 November 1918, Butt and Murphy, 44; Gorky, 142.



of the Kuban' by Russia.”<sup>112</sup> When the Volunteers broke through Bolshevik lines to the Kuban', most Cossacks viewed them as intruders. Others welcomed them cautiously.<sup>113</sup>

Before the start of spring planting season, the Bolsheviks plunged into the Kuban'. “Our offensive,” Trotsky acknowledged, “put the whole Cossack population on their feet.”<sup>114</sup> A Kuban' Cossack colonel led an uprising in the Ryu *stanitsa* near Taman on the Sea of Azov. Moving quickly to meet the Bolshevik advance, Cossack riders crossed the Kerch Strait and strung out along the Kuban' border. At Cossack headquarters in Simferopol, a handful of horsemen and a partial *plastun* division equipped with only a few weapons also prepared to meet the enemy. “Armed with God,” a sympathetic Russian observed, the small Cossack force drew on their own military experience and strategies passed down from their Zaporizhian ancestors to appear like a fully fortified outpost.<sup>115</sup> Fighting until pushed back into the mountains, Cossack units briefly created a buffer zone between the Kuban' and the blazing Don lands.<sup>116</sup>

The Red Army broke through the Cossack lines. They flowed into the Kuban', seizing Ekaterinodar, setting up revolutionary tribunals, and executing 1,600 people. On March 13, 1918, the Kuban' government fled the capital. By early spring, the Red Army encircled the province. This move allowed the Bolsheviks to gain a revolutionary foothold and establish four federated Soviet republics in the area. Ignoring the fact that the majority of the local people remained hostile, the Soviets established the North Caucasus Soviet Republic at Ekaterinodar.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Sokolov, 15, 65.

<sup>113</sup> Hodgson, 24-26, 31-32, 138; Mazour, 457-458; Kenez, *Red Attack, White Resistance*, 123, 126-127, 131-132; Drozdovskii, 431-432; Janke, 294; Antonelli, 108; Gorky, 435.

<sup>114</sup> Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography*, 454.

<sup>115</sup> Sokolov, 21; Obschestvo revnitatei Kubani, ed., *Kubanskoe kazachestvo. Istoriko Literaturnyĭ i illiustrirovanyĭ zhurnal*, no. 13 (Paris: 10 rue des Cordelières, 1931): 20.

<sup>116</sup> Hodgson, 32; Sokolov, 9-10, 18; Serge, *Year One of the Russian Revolution*, 124; Smele, 35.

<sup>117</sup> Miliukov, 81; Gorky, 142; Kenez, *Red Attack, White Resistance*, 37-39; Albov, 138.

Few Cossacks initially welcomed the Volunteers. Disheartened by the White Army's small numbers and fearing Bolshevik reprisals, the Cossacks neither fought nor joined them. When the Whites appeared at the Khomutovghaya *stanitsa* on the Kuban' border, Kornilov called the Cossacks into the village square. He appealed for help and explained how they planned to drive the Bolsheviks from the Kuban'. Stirred by his speech, a number of Cossacks joined up. In the mountains near Nekrassovskaya, Cossacks hiding in the Circassian villages gathered rapidly under Ivan G. Erdeli, Viktor L. Pokrovsky, and Andrei Shkuro. Each unit merged to join other Cossacks operating in the area. The fighting turned mobile and ferocious, following old North Caucasian patterns in guerilla warfare. Trying to locate the Cossack forces, the Volunteers pursued each new rumor from village to valley at lightning speed. By early March, the Whites found the Cossacks who had overran the Bolsheviks in a complete victory at Shendji.<sup>118</sup>

The Bolshevik grip on local power shook the Kuban' government. Returning from the hills, the Rada agreed to cooperate with the army. Caught between Red terror and White pressure, the Cossacks signed a Kuban'-Volunteer agreement. Determined to help the Cossacks throw the Bolsheviks out of the North Caucasus, Kornilov launched an attack on the heavily defended capital. When Kornilov died in the attack, Denikin took command, evacuated the Kuban', and returned to the Donbas. At Mechetinskaya, the Rada members accompanying them refused to enter the Don area. They respected the border as a separate region and returned to stabilize their own territory. By August 2, the army recaptured Ekaterinodar. From this base, the troops gradually swept the North Caucasus free from Bolshevik power.<sup>119</sup>

Critical problems between the Volunteer leadership's unification goals and Cossack independence soon emerged. The new Volunteer Army commander believed absolutely in the

<sup>118</sup> Hodgson, 31-32, 34-36; Borisenko, I:23, 108; Miliukov, 82.

<sup>119</sup> Miliukov, 82; Hodgson, 31-32, 33-36, 40-41; P. N. Wrangel, 89.

Russian state's indivisibility. "A Russia cut into bits cannot exist," Denikin maintained.<sup>120</sup>

Convinced that the anti-Soviet struggle would ignite a widespread nationalist movement to save Russia, Denikin clashed fiercely with the leaders of the borderland separatist nationalities. Two governments, the Volunteer Army and the Rada, emerged in Ekaterinodar. When the Cossacks joined the Volunteer Army to liberate the Kuban', the collaboration signaled the start of a symbiotic but troubled relationship between the Rada and the anti-Bolshevik army.<sup>121</sup>

### ***Volya or Samostiinost'*: Cossack Separatism and the Anti-Bolshevik Armies**

Nationalism served as a cohesive means to fight the Bolsheviks for the minority movements that emerged in the collapse of central authority in Russia. For the *Kubantsy*, the question centered on whether the political future offered an indivisible or a federated Russia. The centrist ideology expressed by Denikin's increasingly obsessive motto, "Russia, One and Indivisible," did not appeal to the Cossacks. When the Kuban' government returned to Ekaterinodar in August, the Rada resumed its plans for a republic based on popular will. The more that the White leadership tried to subjugate the Cossacks, the more the Rada refused to submit to a military dictatorship. Heated discussions ensued between Cossack separatist leaders and White Army representatives. The Volunteer leadership demanded that the Cossacks submit to their authority but failed to offer any compromise to render this acceptable.<sup>122</sup>

The Kuban' Rada worked hard to ensure that their state would have a place in a future autonomous Russian federation. The Cossacks clung to their belief in their right to an independent statehood. Cossack *volya*, rooted in the will of the people, clashed with the army

<sup>120</sup> Hodgson, 177.

<sup>121</sup> Anna Procyk, *Russian Nationalism and Ukraine: The Nationality Policy of the Volunteer Army During the Civil War* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1995), 57-60; Danchenko, 15; Hodgson, 177; Kenez, *White Resistance*, 166-177; Denikin, 281, 302.

<sup>122</sup> Sokolov, 33; Tschebotarioff, 222.

leadership's dedication to a united, and as the Cossacks feared, an autocratic Russia. Convinced that Cossack autonomy undermined White goals and authority, Denikin and General Piotr Wrangel, among others, criminalized Cossack separatism as *samosiinnost'*, or treason.<sup>123</sup>

Although White Army officers' personal political views ranged from monarchist and social democratic to republican or the liberal Kadet party, the Volunteer Army leadership often demonstrated autocratic tendencies. Denikin viewed self-determination as Russian statehood's collapse. He argued that all must unite to destroy the Bolsheviks. In a period filled with emerging minority groups and ethnic nationalist identities, Denikin rejected self-rule as illegitimate and treasonous. The Russians viewed the Cossacks as little more than a military estate, created by and for the state, rather than a preexisting ethnicity. Over five centuries since their early Zaporizhian roots, the Cossacks evolved through their unique dialect, military and social culture, and democratic socio-political system into a distinct ethnic group.<sup>124</sup>

The Kuban' Cossacks' ethnic differences, rejection of authority imposed on them without election or choice, and their development into a political entity collided with the anti-Bolsheviks' vision for a cohesive Russian nation. At first, Denikin stepped carefully. He feared alienating the Cossacks too soon and losing their support. The Rada proved willing to work with Denikin to expel the Bolsheviks. At the same time, they felt that Denikin's attempts to subject the Rada to his authority threatened the Republic's sovereignty. While the Rada did not deny Denikin's authority in the military sphere, they continually defended their Cossack rights against Russian

<sup>123</sup> Piotr N. Krasnov, *Kazach'ia - "samosiinnost'"* (Berlin: Lande and Company, 1921), 1-4; Sokolov, 23, 63; Danchenko, 10.

<sup>124</sup> Denikin, 244; Sokolov 21, 23; Peter Kenez, "The Relations between the Volunteer Army and Georgia, 1918-1920: A Case Study in Disunity," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 48, no. 112 (July 1970): 404-405; E. G. F. Val', *Kak "Pilsudskii pogubil" Denikina* (Tallin: Published by the author, 1938), 8-10; Smele, 37.

control. Refusing to submit politically to the concept of a unified Russian state, the Cossacks remained committed to the idea of a free Kuban'.<sup>125</sup>

Since Kuban' Cossack resistance focused on driving the Bolsheviks from the North Caucasus, they formed the backbone for the Volunteer Army, later called the Armed Forces of South Russia. Despite their commitment to the anti-Bolshevik cause, the Cossacks angered White leadership by insisting on self-rule and seeking statehood recognition from the Allies. Until they wiped out the Bolshevik threat from the Kuban', the Rada declared that they would maintain a defensive stance to insulate their lands. Meanwhile, the Volunteer Army continued to assert a growing demand for men, food, and supplies over the region.<sup>126</sup>

With their Balachka dialect, ties to the Ukraine, and distrust for Russian authority, the Black Sea Kuban' Cossacks swung further to the political left than the Russian-speaking Terek Cossacks. Although Terek Cossack Ataman Filimonov headed the Military Council, the *chornovtsy* had a larger population than the *lineetsy*. As a result, the Black Sea Cossacks had greater voice in regional politics and dominated the Rada. The Cossacks' separatist impulses alarmed the White generals. They considered the concurrent Ukrainian independence movement as destructive as communism for Russia. As a result, the Volunteer Army refused to acknowledge either the Ukrainians or Cossacks as separate people groups.<sup>127</sup>

The White leadership preferred the limited autonomy ideas held by the Terek Cossacks over the separatists' vision for a federated republic. As Military Council head, Filimonov usually stayed quiet on the separatist topic to avoid alienating the regular Cossacks in the Volunteer

<sup>125</sup> Sokolov, 1-2, 32-33; Denikin, 302, Smele, 35; Kenez, *Red Attacks, White Resistance*, 166-177; Tschebotarioff, 222; Kavkazkii Kazak, ed., *Vol'noye Kuban'* (Belgrade, no. 81 (March 1930): 6.

<sup>126</sup> Sokolov, 35.

<sup>127</sup> Great Britain Foreign Office *Reports*, 50, 93; Kenez, *Red Attack, White Resistance*, 37-39; Sokolov, 19; Denikin, 99.

forces. The new White Army constitution, designed to delineate the army's and Rada's spheres of power, highlighted the incompatibility of Cossack and anti-Bolshevik politics. The moderate White politicians and the *lineetsy* agreed that the Whites needed to respect the wishes of the popular majority and offer a compelling alternative to the Soviet government. Recognizing that the Kuban' Cossacks would not freely accept a military dictatorship, the Whites under Denikin and General Mikhail Dragomirov crafted a constitution that threw in phrases such as "federation" to appease the Cossacks and disguise the authors' real goals. The Denikinites hoped to lull Cossack suspicions while transferring military authority, foreign policy, financial, economic, and communication administration into White hands. The federation phrases did not deceive the Rada. They recognized that the proposed constitution echoed the prerevolutionary estate structure by offering only limited local autonomy. Kuban' separatists led by L. L. Bych rejected the Denikin constitution in a unified show of solidarity. Instead, they offered to draw up a new constitution. They never had the chance to submit it.<sup>128</sup>

Despite mutual misunderstandings and incompatibilities, the Cossack leaders went in person to meet with Denikin to propose changes to the constitution. The general declined to discuss the situation but notified them that he intended to address the Rada. This alarmed the Cossacks, who feared that Denikin planned to assert a dictatorship on the spot. After attending a solemn church service, the Cossacks, Whites, and nonresident members walked over to the Rada's assembly hall in the Winter Theater to continue the discussion in a public forum. When Ryabolov offered Denikin the floor, he rose up from his theater box and circled the Rada members. The 8th Kuban' Cossack regiment shifted and looked prepared to protect its leaders. Mounting the stage, Denikin launched into a passionate speech glorifying Russian nationalism

<sup>128</sup> Wrangel, 102-103; Sokolov, 36, 35, 58.

and criminalizing Cossack autonomy. He called on the “glorious Cossacks” to shed their “holy blood” to recreate Russia by supporting a unified state ideology.<sup>129</sup> In the same breath, Denikin rejected the Rada’s desire for a home defense army. Instead, the Cossacks must serve in the Russian army under a single supreme commander. “Do not play with fire,” Denikin warned. The Cossacks could not insulate the Kuban’. If they did not unite to liberate Russia from the Soviets, then the Kuban’ would fall to Bolshevik control. Finally, Denikin forbid the Rada to represent the Kuban’ People’s Republic as a separate nation at the upcoming Paris Peace Conference.<sup>130</sup>

When Denikin turned to exit the building, Ryabолоv invited him to stay and listen to the rest of the meeting. In the vigorous discussion that followed, most Cossacks felt pressured and discouraged by Denikin’s speech. The Kuban’ leaders insisted that they answered to the people rather than to the Volunteer Army. Since the Cossacks did not elect Denikin, they refused to acknowledge his absolute authority. Finally, P.M. Kaplin dressed in a *cherkesska* with dagger, exclaimed, “Have mercy, all this is indefinite.”<sup>131</sup> He explained that the Whites would never recognize Cossack rights. He argued that they needed to resolve the question at the Constituent Assembly. Even N. S. Dogopолоv, an *inogorodnye* delegate, understood the Cossacks’ love for democracy. Overall, the *inogorodnye* members felt reassured. In fact, the nonresidents felt so comfortable that they flooded into the Regional Council. Gradually, the Whites persuaded the nonresidents to support them against the Rada. When the Regional Council continued to disrupt meetings with attacks on the Rada, the government shut it down.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>129</sup> Sokolov, 46-48.

<sup>130</sup> Wrangel, 103-105; Sokolov, 36, 46-48; Anton Denikin, *Ocherki russkoï smuty: Bor’ba generala Kornilova*, Avgust 1917 g. – april’ 1918 g. (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), IV: 45-49.

<sup>131</sup> Sokolov, 50.

<sup>132</sup> Skobtsov, 5-16; Sokolov, 22, 48-50, 52-53, 56-57; 66-67; Miliukov, 162; Smele, 121; Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed*, II, 430; Val’, 8-10.

Forming a Kuban' Army to insulate their borders and exercise leadership over their own troops had appealed to Cossack leaders since autumn 1917. Since the Don Army retained a separate existence, it only deployed on the Don front. The preservation of the Don Army's integrity encouraged the Rada that creating a First Kuban' Army lay in reach. Because the presence of most of their troops at the front stripped the Kuban' of defenses, the Rada negotiated to withdraw some troops to create a Kuban' Army. The Whites refused. Denikin and Wrangel, commanding the First Caucasian Army, saw the request as an attempt to decentralize authority and pull crucial Kuban' units back from the front. The Military Council held a moderate position. Neither supporting nor condemning the separatists, Filimonov shifted into a neutral space while the Rada and Denikinites clashed over his head. Although throttled by red tape, the Rada dragged its feet on sending more troops north to advance on Moscow. When Wrangel realized that the Rada delayed sending reinforcements because the Whites ignored their requests for a Kuban' Army, he confronted them at Ekaterinodar. Kuban' Cossack General Vyacheslav G. Naumenko, a cool-headed and charismatic combat officer, left the front lines to act as a negotiator between Wrangel and the Rada. At the meeting, the Kuban' members agreed to send troops once Denikin agreed to their request. The Whites retorted that the Rada had no one capable to command an independent army. "But we are not asking that," Naumenko clarified calmly. He explained that Wrangel, a popular, non-Cossack officer, already commanded the Caucasian Army. The Rada felt satisfied if Wrangel chose to lead the Kuban' Army. This action would transfer both the Caucasian Army's troops and ability to control them from Denikin to the Kuban' government. Turning on Naumenko, Wrangel threatened to dissolve the Rada if they elected him head of the Kuban' Army. The meeting broke up in silence.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>133</sup> Denikin, 247; Aten, 140-141; Wrangel, 90-91.



The problem remained that the Volunteer Army had largely become a Kuban' Cossack army under Russian leadership. Due to heavy reliance on the Cossacks, the Denikin faction refused to allow the Rada military or administrative powers that would reduce the Whites' control and depopulate field forces to cover regional defenses. The Rada continued to refuse to bow to Denikin's authority but stopped short of pulling Cossack units out of the army. Filimonov resigned during the crisis. The new ataman, Didatom Lintsev, also favored separatism and a regional army. The controversy over creating a First Kuban' Army reflected a growing inability on either side to enact compromises to achieve a beneficial result.<sup>134</sup>

Tensions escalated between Denikin and the Rada. By early autumn, the separatists openly publicized the need for an inviolable Cossack land completely separate from Russia. The Kuban' government developed a free press called the "Kuban'sky krai" in their local Balachka dialect. The newspaper fervently promoted Cossack nationalism and supported the concurrent Ukrainian patriotic movement. Between 1918 and 1919, the Rada took steps to establish friendly relations with the Ukrainian Hetmanate government that sought independence from Russia. Over the next few months, Kuban' leaders debated the advisability about annexing Kuban' to the Ukraine. On January 4, 1919, twenty-nine political parties and organizations met at the Ukrainian Black Sea Council to approve the action. While direct descendants of the Zaporizhian Cossacks voted to join forces with Ukraine, others remained undecided on the best option. The Cossacks not only felt kinship with the Ukraine, but they needed political allies and military armaments. Ryabovol negotiated with the Hetmanate to provide them with weapons from

<sup>134</sup> Albov, 138; Val', 58. Kenez, "The Volunteer Army and Georgia," 404-405; Trotsky, Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography*, 453.

Russian wartime stockpiles held in warehouses in Kiev. By November, the Ukrainian government officially recognized the Kuban' Cossacks as an ethnic minority group.<sup>135</sup>

Days after the Ukrainian secretary spoke about goodwill between the Kuban' and the Ukrainian people at the Rada assembly, White agents arrested him without explanation. Security forces tore down the blue and yellow flag and ransacked the Ukrainian embassy house quartered near the Rada headquarters. On a cold Valentine's Day night in February 1919, an armed White detachment also halted the Ukrainian ambassador Fedir K. Borzhynskyi's train near Volnovakha. Borzhynskyi, a tall, gentle man with a long Zaporizhian mustache, had just returned from Ekaterinodar where he vigorously supported Kuban' independence. After a hasty night trial, White intelligence agents took Borzhynskyi to the town outskirts and shot him for treason to Russia. The Volunteer Army promptly annulled the Kuban'-Ukrainian union.<sup>136</sup>

### **The Autonomous Republic of Mountain Peoples**

The year 1919 began badly for the Kuban' government. P. S. Shushkov, a Denikin protégé, headed the Rada. By May, the Shushkov faction resigned. Then a new round of elections gave the separatist Cossacks an overwhelming majority. Every local Cossack assembly voted for separatist leaders and Kuban' independence. General N. A. Bukretov, a key Denikin critic, became Rada ataman. The Rada chose Ryabolov, the Kuban'-Ukraine alliance leader, as the second Rada chairman next to Bych. Denikin supporters responded by offering D. I. Litovkin, the sole White Army representative, as an alternative candidate. In typical democratic fashion, the Cossacks pointed out they could not overthrow a duly elected president. The

<sup>135</sup> Denikin, 245; Sokolov, 22-23, 30; Protopopov, 9; Stephan Rindlisbacher, "From Space to Territory: Negotiating the Russo-Ukrainian Border, 1919-1928," *Revolutionary Russia*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2018): 86; Thomas M. Prymak, "The First All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets and its Antecedents," *Journal of Ukrainian Graduate Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 11.

<sup>136</sup> Protopopov, 9.

Cossacks voiced their fear that Denikin's rule demonstrated all the characteristics of a dictatorship. They insisted that the Cossacks should fight autocracy as stubbornly as they resisted bolshevism. The Kuban' leaders proved too outspoken. As Ryabolov opened negotiations with Ukraine to land supporting troops in the Kuban', White intelligence rapidly uncovered the ongoing Kuban'-Ukrainian plans. At the South-Ukrainian Union conference on June 13, 1919, Ryabolov openly criticized the Denikin regime. Hours later, Ryabolov was dead.<sup>137</sup>

The murder of the Rada chairman dealt a devastating blow to the Kuban' separatists. As he entered the Palace Hotel in Rostov, Ryabolov took two shots to the back of his head. His assassins, identified as White agents by witnesses, escaped. Ryabolov's death remained a stark symbol of the lengths to which the Russians would go to destroy Cossack autonomy. During that summer, they retaliated against the separatists with a burst of terror. On the night of May 8, White agents narrowly missed killing anti-*zemstvo* activist Makarenko. The assassination plot succeeded against Kondrat L. Bardizh, the Cossack Minister of the Interior and supporter for equal Cossack and nonresident rights.<sup>138</sup>

The Cossack struggle for a free Kuban' resonated from the borderlands to Western Europe. Despite their distant location in the North Caucasus, the Rada leaders remained well informed about political trends and events in Europe. Above all, the Kuban' Cossacks wanted to establish a legitimate republic recognized by their European allies. They eagerly supported

<sup>137</sup> Denikin, 245; Sokolov, 22-23, 30; Protopopov, 9.

<sup>138</sup> Sokolov, 22-23, 30; Protopopov, 9; Denikin, 245.

\*The Volunteer Army leadership also worked to eradicate Cossack separatist aspirations in the Don Army. On April 18, 1920, a military tribunal headed by General Wrangel and General Dragomirov condemned General Vladimir Sidorin, commander of the Don Army, and Don Army Chief of Staff General Anatoly Kelchevsky, to four years' hard labor. The sentence also stripped the Cossack generals of military rank and nobility. When the Don Ataman Afrikan Bogaevsky requested a more lenient sentence, Wrangel commuted the punishment to dismissal from the military in a disciplinary manner, without the right to wear a uniform, and banishment from Russia in May 1920. Kelchevsky, already in frail health, died from heart failure three years later.

American president Woodrow Wilson's concepts that affirmed the "right of small nations to self-determination."<sup>139</sup> In discussions with White leadership and British Mission members, the Kuban' government expressed its desire to abide by international law.<sup>140</sup>

The Kuban' leaders began negotiations with the mountain *medjilis* to join the Autonomous Republic of Mountain Peoples. Like the South-East Union, this loosely federated alliance supported self-determination among the North Caucasus people groups. The alliance demonstrated that the Cossacks saw themselves more closely aligned with the indigenous mountain peoples than with Russia. In autumn 1919, Kuban' Cossack politicians joined the Russian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. At the conference, the Cossacks appealed to the allies for statehood recognition. The western delegates, who saw little political, economic, or military benefit in supporting a small independent republic against the main anti-Bolshevik forces, chose to remain neutral. The Cossacks saw that they must save themselves. They turned again to the Caucasus for support. In an overlooked episode at the Paris Peace Conference, L. L. Bych, Alexei I. Kulabukov, and several other Kuban' leaders signed a treaty with the Mountain Republic of the Peoples of the North Caucasus. The agreement sought mutual solidarity, acknowledgement of the minority peoples' rights to self-rule, gradual withdrawal of supplies and support from Denikin, and the "full independence of the Kuban'."<sup>141</sup>

The intense political climate swung into punitive violence. When Denikin and Wrangel discovered that the Kuban' delegates signed a separate treaty at the Paris Peace conference, they ordered a coup against the Rada. On November 6, General Pokrovsky and his troops surrounded the Rada at the Winter Theater. He demanded that the conservative members throw thirty-three

<sup>139</sup> Woodrow Wilson, "Fourteen Points," 1918, Library of Congress Manuscript Division.

<sup>140</sup> Hodgson, 123; Sokolov, 35, 55-56.

<sup>141</sup> Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia*, 119 Smele, n. 281; Harry Hanson, *The Adventures of the Fourteen Points* (New York: The Century Company, 1919), 262; Aten, 140-141; Wrangel, 104-106; Kosok, 45-46.

separatists out to them. In the chaos, several Kuban' Cossacks jumped out the window. The excited soldiers killed one man on the spot. The others escaped. Then Pokrovsky called out the names of the most wanted men.<sup>142</sup>

Denikin ordered all the Kuban' signers arrested and brought before him in a field court. Furious that the Cossacks appealed to the Allies for state recognition, Denikin determined to make an example to stamp out the independence movement. On November 7, a drumhead court-martial condemned Kulabukhov, a popular Cossack priest, to death. Within hours, the Whites hanged Kulabukhov in the street in Ekaterinodar. A sign dangling around his neck read, "Treason to the Motherland and the Cossacks." The execution of an amiable, intelligent, and respected priest sparked anger and terror among the Cossack population. Denikin's treatment created the desired effect. The remaining diplomatic delegation, fearing mass execution, could not return to the Kuban'. Makarenko, a key pro-Ukrainian Kuban' separatist and outspoken Denikin opponent, slipped through the White cordon and escaped to the Terek Line.<sup>143</sup>

The visceral response that Ryabolov's murder and Kulabukhov's execution provoked among the Cossacks at the front demonstrated the extent to which ordinary Cossacks supported the separatists. The coup against the Rada stirred up bitterness among many Kuban' Cossacks in the Volunteer Army. Street fighting broke out in Ekaterinodar on the night of November 12. Cossacks cut railway communication between Denikin and the Black Sea coast. In the Rada, the remaining Cossacks threatened to stop all supplies to the White Army. After crushing the separatist movement leaders, the Whites quickly elected a new, more submissive puppet Rada.<sup>144</sup>

<sup>142</sup> Wrangel, 103-105; Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia*, 119; Smele, 50, 281; Protopopov, 9.

\*The key Cossack ideological separatists included I. L. Makarenko, and his brother P. L. Makarenko, Kulabukhov, Goncharov, Beskrovny, Manzhula, Voropinov, Omelchenko, Foskov, Rogovyts, Pidtoplenny, and Zhuk.

<sup>143</sup> Miliukov, 162; Smele, 281; Protopopov, 9.

<sup>144</sup> Hodgson, 125; Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia*, 119.

The Whites tried to eradicate Cossack autonomy by military force. Since they refused to accept that the Cossack majority preferred to rule themselves, the anti-Bolsheviks argued that the Kuban' separatists represented only a small percentage from the Cossack population. White leadership represented the separatists as a minority group of troublemakers imposing their radical beliefs on the majority. Local Cossack assemblies not only voted overwhelmingly for self-determination but to force a minority will on the people fundamentally violated Cossack ethics. Each time that the White leadership attempted to subordinate the Rada to a military dictatorship, the separatists argued that they answered only to the people. To recognize that the Cossacks' core political outlook centered on the right to self-determination would have forced the Whites to admit that the Cossacks identified as a separate ethnos rather than as an indivisible Russian nation. If the Denikinites acknowledged that their centrist policies went against the popular will, then this would have forced them to consider self-rule's legitimacy. Admitting that ethnic minorities had the right to choose their own government undermined the Whites' attempts to reconstruct a monolithic Russian state. Discouraged by their leaders' fate, the Kuban' Cossacks, who made up seventy percent of the Caucasian Army, began to desert. Many returned to their villages rather than continue to fight the Volunteer Army's war that seemed as intent on fighting the Bolsheviks as on recreating a central Russian state.<sup>145</sup>

Despite their conflicted relationship, the Cossacks remained a significant asset to the anti-Bolshevik forces. The White leadership valued the Cossacks' organization, unity, and fighting power. As a result, they resorted to coercive measures to control and direct Cossack military strength. By December, remaining Cossack leaders placed the hosts' administration

<sup>145</sup> Sokolov, 33-34, 45; Schedule A, Vol. 5, Case 54, in the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, Harvard University Widener Library; Miliukov, 142, 162; Brent Mueggenberg, *The Cossack Struggle against Communism, 1917-1945* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2019), 135; Protopopov, 9.

under Denikin's control. In early 1920, a High *Krug* met to unite the Don, Kuban', and Terek *voiskos*. Separatist echoes resurfaced when the delegates crafted the agreement. After a hot debate, the council removed the word "Russia" from the oath. On March 17, the Reds captured Ekaterinodar. The Rada escaped to Novorossiysk where the Kuban' People's Republic ceased to exist. Even without a political leader, envisioned by some as the People's Republic and by others as a "Cossack Tsar," the Kuban' remained a center of revolt.<sup>146</sup>

Morning mist flooded the Kuban'. In the square on the western edge of a Cossack village, a black cloud of horses massed together. The horses shifted under riders with tense faces, *shashkas* tucked into their belts, and Berdianka rifles slung across their backs. Around them, the village lay asleep. Cutting through the *sotnias*, the colonel greeted his men quietly. The hundreds closed around him. As the line began to move, men slipped into their yards to tell their wives goodbye. Some drank fresh milk cold from the cellar in a last taste of home that lingered with them as the column moved out of the village towards the enemy. "With God, after me," the officer said softly. "With God!" the Cossacks replied. Beyond the village, in a hollow curved into the Kuban' land, the detachment halted. Looking into his men's faces, the colonel explained their orders. Each Cossack's natural experience in swift, shifting, and irregular tactics applied to the fight against the Bolsheviks. The enemy could hide behind rocks, lie in gullies, and skulk on village borders. Warning them not to smoke, since the thin blue haze could alert Soviet partisans, the officer gave the order to ride. The Cossacks flowed in a mass into the wild steppe.<sup>147</sup>

<sup>146</sup> Ainsworth, 628; Smele, 121; Denikin, 20; Gorky, 418; Serge, *Year One*, 31; Kuban' Cossack oral history transcript, Schedule A, vol. 5, case 58, Harvard Refugee Interview Project, 1950, 28.

<sup>147</sup> Eliseev, *Kornilovskim*, 147.

## Chapter IV

### Resistance

#### “They Fight Any Power, or Regime, or Idea”

*North Caucasus: Spring 1918*

At dawn, church bells ringing violently brought armed Kuban' Cossacks into the village square. They poured in to find a strange ataman watching them from a sleek Kabarda horse. The tall Cossack officer, with a dark mustache in a lean face, wore a karakul wool hat over his eyes and a rifle slung across his shoulder. Nikita Podymov spoke quickly and intensely to the crowd. His call to liberate Russia from the “hated Red power” stirred the Cossacks into action. His charismatic persona made him a rebel leader that the Cossacks wanted to follow. One hundred men joined his force on the spot. Ataman Podymov ignited a local resistance movement that spread with every *stanitsa* that they passed. Cossack units fanned out into the mountains as the Volunteers struggled across a freezing Kuban' River to meet them. For the next five years, in the space between the Cossack struggle for independence and the Whites' shifting grip on territorial power, the conflict in the North Caucasus often unfolded as an atamans' war.<sup>148</sup>

Since the October Revolution, the Don and Kuban' fronts formed a strategic counterrevolutionary haven. As anti-Bolshevik movements stirred in early 1918, these regions emerged as centers of revolt. The Soviets represented the Bolshevik coup as a people's revolution and the Soviet state as a popular government. In reality, the Bolsheviks remained a political minority backed by utopian promises, deliberate tactics, and a solid worker and conscripted peasant base. By spring 1918, Bolshevik troops hurried to destroy the remnants of

<sup>148</sup> Eliseev, *Kornilovskim*, 149-150.



the Russian Imperial Army merging in the Cossack territories. As counterrevolution rose in the south, the Civil War that ensued became in many ways a war against the Cossacks.<sup>149</sup>

The Cossack resistance movements in the early twentieth-century Kuban' can be viewed less in the context of regular military forces engaging in civil war than a massive liberation effort to repel Russian invasion. In contrast to common interpretations that mark the Civil War from the Ice March to the last stand at Perekop in 1920, the anti-Soviet struggle did not conform to the neat historical boundaries of organized war. When Wrangel's beaten forces scrambled out of the Crimea, they left behind a Kuban' in flames. With the Rada destroyed and its military support exiled or dead, the Kuban' Cossacks fled into the hills to escape Bolshevik terror. They carried on an obscure existence as anti-Bolshevik insurgents. Outlawed as bandits, the Cossacks assassinated local Soviet leaders in attempts to free or avenge their families. "They care nothing for Russia," observed an American officer during the Civil War. "They fight any power, or regime, or idea that interferes with their old privileges."<sup>150</sup> White partisans operated in the North Caucasus until at least 1926. Despite decossackization, deportation, and collectivization, the shadowy concept of a free Kuban' existed in Cossack collective consciousness until they rose up against the Soviets again with devastating consequences during the Second World War.<sup>151</sup>

Despite pro-Soviet partisans operating in the North Caucasus, the Kuban' largely represented an anti-Bolshevik region that the Red Army endeavored to subdue and secure for the

<sup>149</sup> Christopher Lazarski, *The Lost Opportunity: Attempts at Unification of the Anti-Bolsheviks, 1917-1919, Moscow, Kiev, Jassy, Odessa* (University Press of America, 2008), 19; James Ryan, *Lenin's Terror: The Ideological Origins of Early Soviet State Violence* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 84; Engelstein, 367.

<sup>150</sup> Koehler, 140.

<sup>151</sup> Kazach'yago soyuz, ed., *Kazach'e Edinstvo* (Paris, no. 1 (March 1934): 2; Brovkin, 355; A. G. Shkuro, *Grazhdanskaia voïna v Rossii: Zapiski belogo partizana* (Buenos Aires: Editado Pour La Revista Sembrador, 1961), 195; O'Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 268; *Vol'noye Kuban'*, 6; Kuban' Cossack interview, oral history transcript, Schedule A, vol. 5, case 54, Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, 1950, 12; Ukrainian oral history transcript, Schedule A, vol. 37, case 622, 1719, 45; Kuban' Cossack oral history transcript, Schedule A, vol. 5, case 58, Harvard Refugee Interview Project, Slavic Division: Widener Library, Harvard University, 1950, 28.

next several years. When Bolshevik commissars formed governments at Sevastopol and Taman on the Black Sea coast and then declared the area Sovietized, the Cossacks repeatedly forced the Bolsheviks out. The North Caucasian Red Army and the Taman Red Army, composed largely from the nonresidents, presented a continual threat to Cossack villages as the Volunteer Army diverted Cossack troops away from the Kuban' on northern offensives.<sup>152</sup>

When the Bolsheviks pressed into the North Caucasus, the Kuban' rose. At first, Cossack communities feared Red reprisals. Many also viewed the Whites as intruders. Slow at first, the resistance movement gathered momentum, according to one Cossack officer, "like a ball of snow rolling down a mountain."<sup>153</sup> At each battle, Cossacks drafted by the Reds quickly surrendered to the Whites. Cossack units already operated in the hills. When the Volunteers started conscripting from Kuban' *stanitsas*, the Cossacks joined regular army units since they did not have their own Kuban' army. Some dropped out as soon as the army moved away from their villages. Although many Cossacks kept fighting with the army once they secured the North Caucasus, tensions remained between the Whites' national goals and the Cossacks' regional concerns.<sup>154</sup>

The Cossacks formed the backbone of the Volunteer Army. Morale surged to new heights as volunteers fled south to join the White Army. By June, they reached 9,000. Kuban' Cossacks composed half of this number. The massive effort carried them on a crest of victories as they moved into the Ukraine and lower Volga regions and poised to take Moscow.<sup>155</sup>

<sup>152</sup> Great Britain Foreign Office, *Reports*, 50, 93; Hodgson, 122; Eliseev, *Kornilovskim*, 200; Sokolov, 62.

<sup>153</sup> Eliseev, *Kornilovskim*, 268.

<sup>154</sup> Brovkin, 33; Trotsky, "Criminal Demagogy," in *How the Revolution Armed*, 334-335; Report read in Moscow, in the Hall of Columns in the House of the Unions, 24 February 1919, in *How the Revolution Armed*, 28, 32; Trotsky, "Finish it Before Winter Comes!," in *How the Revolution Armed*, 330, 333; Trotsky, "The Tenth Army," order no. 83, in *How the Revolution Armed*, 387; Trotsky, "Plans for Operations on the Southern Front," in *How the Revolution Armed*, 432; Kuban' Cossack oral history transcript, schedule A, vol. 13, case 175, Harvard University Refugee Interview Project, 4; Denikin, 245, 319; Hodgson, 46, 53. \*Some very young Kuban' Cossacks, mobilized by the Reds, continued to fight in the ranks of the Red Army while their fathers fought for the Whites.

<sup>155</sup> Albov, 174; Leon Trotsky, "Our Military Construction and Our Fronts; Report Read at the 7th All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers, Peasants, Red Army and Labor Cossacks Deputies on the 7th of December

At the start of the Civil War in 1918, the Don centers at Rostov and Novocherkassk controlled the railway line that ran down to the North Caucasus. Uniting Cossack resistance in the Kuban' and isolating local Bolsheviks from mainland Soviet power meant that the Cossacks initially had some potential to prevent external invasion. Since the Kuban' Cossack host represented around 1,340,000 or 46% of the total Kuban' population, insulating themselves from an internal enemy proved impossible. It meant that the Cossacks attempted to guard a territory interspersed with Soviet partisans who engaged them in a savage guerilla war. The Cossacks' military organization, solidarity, and peripheral location imbued their leaders with the belief that they could halt an external danger at the Kuban' border. This ultimately proved impossible.<sup>156</sup>

### **War of Annihilation**

Despite forays into the Don and campaigns that launched pincer-movement thrusts north towards Moscow, much of the Cossack war played out on the North Caucasus front. By late 1918, the White Army had more conscripted members than volunteers. Most of its fighting power lay in its heavy Kuban' Cossack base. As military professionals, the Cossacks protected the army's rear and sliced through larger Red Army forces. The Whites crossed railroads, took armored trains, and fought from the *stanitsas* Mirskaya and Lezhanka to Mechetenskaya and Mikhailovskaya. Kuban' units also shifted north in a campaign that penetrated deep into Red territory. The Bolsheviks observed that the Volunteers moved offensively while the Cossacks generally fought defensively to protect their own regions. The separatist Rada, locked in a battle for autonomy with Denikin, recognized that these northward movements stripped defense forces

1919," Moscow Executive Committee of the Communist International, 1920, in *How the Revolution Armed*, 30; Val', 65; Sokolov, 7, 18; Kenez, *Red Attack, White Resistance*, 37-39.

<sup>156</sup> Denikin, *Russian Turmoil*, 20; Tuganov, 206; Krasnov, *From the Two-Headed Eagle*, IV:190.

from their communities. Until 1920, the White leadership denied Cossack leaders' requests to form a Kuban' Army since this would detach units to create regional defense positions and hinder the army's main objective to retake central Russia.<sup>157</sup>

The war for the Kuban' scorched through Cossack villages. The Soviets recognized that the Cossack population generally remained hostile to the Bolsheviks. In the confused, violent, and unstable civil war atmosphere, ordinary people fell victim to both Red terror policies and White revenge. The Soviets gave the Cheka, the secret police force that specialized in mass terror, free rein to liquidate the Cossacks as state enemies. The North Caucasian Red Army and the Taman Red Army unleashed a reign of terror on the Kuban'. The Reds attacked *stanitsas* without warning, shouting, "Death to the Cossacks!" They set fire to houses, stables, and grain. Women and children fled into the steppe. In one village, a few officers and old Cossacks stayed to fight. As the Reds burst into the church square, gunfire erupted from behind fences and outbuildings. The first shots took down the Red commander. Officers with St. George crosses swinging from their chests fought multiple Reds simultaneously, while old men picked Soviets off with hunting rifles from their yards. At night, surviving villagers crept back to burned homes and dead relatives. When the Volunteer Army returned to the Donbas in spring 1918, the Cossacks unleashed their fury on the Reds that terrorized their villages in their absence.<sup>158</sup>

The war turned into a community struggle. As Soviet units entered first the Don and then the Kuban Cossack communities, the Cossacks that had not previously mobilized turned against

<sup>157</sup> Hodgson, 49-50, 53; Koehler, 140, Kenez, *Red Attack, White Resistance*, 37-39, 66-177; Eliseev, *Kornilovskim*, 263; Denikin, 240, 313; Aten, 47, 230-232; Trotsky, "Order by the Chairman of the Revolutionary War Council of the Republic and the People's Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs, 4 September 1919, in 403; Trotsky, "Plans for Operations on the Southern Front," in *How the Revolution Armed*, 432.

<sup>158</sup> Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed*, 429; George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), 444; K. Alinin, *Tche-ka: The Story of the Bolshevik Extraordinary Commission: The Personal Reminiscences of the Odessa Tchrezvychaika* (London: Russian Liberation Committee, 1920), 56; Eliseev, *Korilovskim*, 133, 245-246, 249; Piotr N. Wrangel, 56.

them. Every man in the villages at Veshenskaya, Migulinskaya, and Kazanskaya rose up, “swearing never to surrender.”<sup>159</sup> Young Cossack women with no formal military training rode out to the front with their brothers. The effective community mobilization gave Denikin the backing that he needed to use Cossack cavalry and British tanks to maneuver to a serious advantage in 1918 and 1919. The uprisings forced the Bolsheviks to grudgingly recognize, as they ferociously put down the revolts, that they had a genuine “people’s war” on their hands.<sup>160</sup>

As Denikin moved back south to attack Ekaterinodar, the Kuban’ Cossacks fought closer to regaining their capital. Kuban’ General Skhuro captured Stavropol on July 15. When Denikin hurled troops in to throw off the Red counterattack, the Red Cossack Ivan Sorokin smashed into Denikin’s rear. The White lines failed to break. By August 7, the Reds retreated back into Ekaterinodar. Within a week, the Whites defeated the Taman Red Army protecting Sorokin’s left flank. After a day’s battle, the Kuban’ Cossacks entered Ekaterinodar. Weeping crowds surged to meet them. The liberation army looked sunburned, dirty, and exhausted. Teenage boys, gray-bearded men, and Cossack officers wore diagonal white stripes across their fur hats. They carried sawn-off shotguns, tsarist army carbines, and old hunting rifles.<sup>161</sup>

Over the next several months, the Volunteer Army destroyed Soviet power in the North Caucasus. By November, the Whites secured Stavropol for the second time. Cossack cavalry chased the Reds out of town and spent the remaining weeks rooting out Soviets throughout the area. By the end of the month, they swept the Don country, the Kuban’, Stavropol, and Black Sea

<sup>159</sup> Trotsky, “Plan for Operations on the Southern Front,” in *How the Revolution Armed*, 430.

<sup>160</sup> Hodgson, 136; Marina Yurlova, *Cossack Girl* (Hamburg: Albatross Books, 1935), 20; Trotsky, “Speech in the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’, Peasants’, and Red Army Men’s Deputies, at the Session of October 19, 1919, in *How the Revolution Armed*, 430-431; 546-547.

<sup>161</sup> Kamyshansky, 235-236; Wrangel, 51; Kenez, *Red Attack*, 188; Eliseev, *Kornilovskim*, 179-180.

regions practically clean. They established an anti-Bolshevik *vendée* line stretching over 300 miles wide and extending 500 miles deep into the Don and Kuban' interiors.<sup>162</sup>

The mobility and striking speed demonstrated by Cossack cavalry won the Whites victories early in the war since the Bolsheviks initially scorned cavalry as both outdated and counterrevolutionary. By 1919, Leon Trotsky changed his mind. As well-trained cavalry officers and Cossack horsemen struck rapid blows at larger and slower Red forces and bolted to safety, the Soviets ordered the proletariat, "You must get on horseback."<sup>163</sup> Bolshevik commander Semyon Budyonny, an *inogorodnye* from the Don Cossack region, mirrored Cossack tactics to craft the Red cavalry into a terrifying force. The Cossacks often proved difficult to catch because they operated as their ancestors fought from a shifting base. This type of guerilla warfare worked since the Whites did not maintain a solid front. The Cossacks avoided the main Red Army, drove deep into their rear, and secured manpower and supplies from the local population. Unlike the generally disorganized revolts launched by peasants against Soviet power, the Cossacks aimed precise and organized blows at Bolshevik weak spots. Furious at their effectiveness, Trotsky demanded that the Cossack cavalry be "exterminated by all means available."<sup>164</sup>

This type of swift and relentless small-scale warfare enabled lesser White forces to disorganize and weaken larger Red forces. During the summer campaigns, some renegade British pilots, officially forbidden to engage in diplomatically dicey military support, took a few planes into the air to support the Whites. Allied aircraft zoomed above the battlefield to rake Bolshevik ambushes poised to massacre the Cossacks as they flew along a curve in the land in head-on *lava*

<sup>162</sup> Piotr M. Volkonskii, *The Volunteer Army of Alexiev and Denikin* (London: Russian Liberation Committee, 1919), 6, 9; Hodgson, 49-50; Borisenko, I: 8.

<sup>163</sup> Trotsky, "Military Construction Report," in *How the Revolution Armed*, 34.

<sup>164</sup> Denikin, 561; Trotsky, South Russia Report II, in *How the Revolution Armed*, 60; Trotsky, "Order by the Chairman of the Revolutionary War Council of the Republic and the People's Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs," 4 September 1919, no. 147, in *How the Revolution Armed*, 403.

attack on the Soviet main body. The Bolshevik leadership recognized the destabilizing threat that Cossack raids posed to Soviet power. During 1919, Kuban' Cossack warfare stabilized the North Caucasus and enabled Denikin to focus on invading the central Russia region to the north.<sup>165</sup>

In summer 1919, the Cossacks and the Volunteers initiated a sweeping offensive aimed at securing industrial centers and taking the Soviet capital in Moscow. The massive offensive swung north as the thrust towards Moscow gained momentum. The war expanded into three fronts along the Donetz river basin, the north Don area, and the Manych River line. The Whites planned to send more Cossack units to mop up anarchist bands in the army's rear, but the Rada resisted sending their troops so far from the home to infringe on the neighboring Don territory.<sup>166</sup>

The push to Moscow persisted through August. By mid-month, a Red counterattack halted Wrangel's advance and drove it back to Tsaritsyn. Don cavalry under Konstantin Mamontov engaged in raids towards Tambov while Denikin's troops marched up the Dnieper River and secured Kiev. Early October found Don Army commander Vladimir Sidorin seizing Voronezh while Vladimir Mai-Mayevsky took Orel. Before heavy snow fell in October, Denikin poised to threaten Moscow. Lenin and the Soviet government prepared to flee.<sup>167</sup>

### **Decline**

Overextended, cut off from industrial centers, suffering heavy casualties, and engaged in squabbles with the Rada over troop control, the White offensive ran down. Denikin struggled to hold the line between the Don and Manych Rivers. By late 1919, most cities captured by the

<sup>165</sup> Trotsky, Military Construction Report, 30, 34, 83, 104; Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed*, "A Severe Purge is Necessary", 7 January 1919, 244-245; Trotsky, "Guerillaism and the Regular Army," in *How the Revolution Armed*, 80-81; Hodgson, 106; Tschebotarioff, *Russia, My Native Land*, 240-241; Aten, 81-83, 132.

<sup>166</sup> Wrangel, 81, 85-89; Aten, 78, 96-99; Smele, 120, 123, 125; Drozdovskii, 12; Hodgson, 119-120; Tschebotarioff, *Russia, My Native Land*, 235.

<sup>167</sup> Wrangel, 81, 85-89; Aten, 78, 96-99; A. B. Murphy, "Black Sea, Civil War: 1919-1920," *Revolutionary Russia*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2008): 42-43.

Whites began falling into Red hands. Sick and wounded numbers skyrocketed. Typhus, cholera, and typhoid raged through South Russia towns. By December, Denikin could only muster 42,000 able-bodied soldiers out of a force that totaled 200,000 earlier that year. The surge that invigorated the Cossacks to raise a massive liberation effort the previous year drained away. Desertions increased as the men knew that hunger and terror stalked their families. Sick and demoralized Cossacks left for home. Others kept fighting through falling snow. Watching the White movement dissolve, the allied governments advised British, French and American troops to withdraw. Morale fell as there seemed no help and no way to stop the Bolsheviks.<sup>168</sup>

In retreat, Denikin attempted to patch his relationship with the Cossack leaders. The Whites' efforts to create a last-minute South Russian government revealed how much the anti-Bolshevik movement relied heavily on Cossack support. A Supreme *Krug* gathered the Cossack hosts to hear Denikin promise a Constituent Assembly and land reforms that must have seemed like a vague dream. For the first time, the White leadership also permitted the "hated separatists" to form their own Kuban' Army. Wrangel and Shkuro hit heads when each man arrived in Ekaterinodar to recruit soldiers for the Volunteer Army and the Kuban' Army. For unknown reasons, White intelligence officers advised Shkuro that Wrangel planned to mount a coup to restore autocracy. This rumor encouraged Kuban' Cossacks to join Shkuro's forces rather than Wrangel's army. The Kuban' Army rapidly crumbled, opening fatal gaps in the White lines.<sup>169</sup>

Tensions also intensified as Wrangel quarreled with Denikin about the need to turn Novorossiysk into an armed camp. Although Denikin quickly changed his mind and started fortifying the city, Wrangel declined to lead the Caucasian Army and resigned. In March, the

<sup>168</sup> Miliukov, 140, 142, 174; Aten, 211-212; Wrangel, 106; Tuganov, 177; Mueggenberg, 135; Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 153.

<sup>169</sup> Danchenko, 15; Wrangel, 131-139; Aten, 150, 234-235, 150; Val', 10, 58.



Kuban' People's Republic escaped to Novorossiysk. Retreating south, Denikin established a new base in the Crimea in the event of defeat. When the Reds recaptured Ekaterinodar, they drove the remaining Whites towards the Black Sea. Denikin's officers voted to hand command over to Wrangel. Denikin resigned, named Wrangel as his successor, and fled. Trapped on the coast, a debacle ensued as 50,000 sick, wounded, and able-bodied troops, and thousands of frenzied civilians trampled each other to board too few ships. Denikin and his men crowded onto British ships, left the panicked crowds that they could not rescue behind, and sailed from the Crimea.<sup>170</sup>

During the retreat, the Volunteer Army abandoned thousands of Kuban' Cossacks shielding their safe passage to the harbor. Some Cossacks fought their way out as the Reds came down the hills above the city. Others raced along the coast to meet ships that picked them up. Although some escaped into the mountains, pursued by Red cavalry, the Cossacks felt intense bitterness at the army's actions that used them and then discarded them at a critical time.<sup>171</sup>

### **Kuban' Spring**

With the anti-Bolshevik forces in ruins, the war temporarily went underground. Red soldiers swarmed the North Caucasus. People hid or fell into prison as the Bolsheviks transferred power to local Soviets. Rumors circulated that numerous rebels against Soviet power survived. The Cossacks that could not leave on the ships escaped via the Sochi and Tuapse road into the mountains around the Black Sea. Kuban', Don, and Terek soldiers mingled with a swelling refugee crowd that clung to them for protection. Forty thousand soldiers and civilians stumbled through rough countryside, pursued by Red punitive units sent to wipe them out. Struggling over

<sup>170</sup> Wrangel, 122-123, 129, 132-138; Miliukov, 173-174; Albov, 133; Denikin, 261; Trotsky, "South Russia Report II," 60; Ernest P. Bicknell, *With the Red Cross in Europe 1917-1922* (Washington, D. C.: American National Red Cross, 1938), 398-399, 409; Tschebotarioff, *Russia, My Native Land*, Smele, 121.

<sup>171</sup> Tschebotcharieff, *Russia, My Native Land*, 270; John A. Hutchins, "The Wrangel Refugees: A Study of General Baron Peter N. Wrangel's Defeated White Russian Forces, Both Military and Civilian, in Exile," University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky, 1972, 1; Wrangel, 137-138.

mountain tracks, the Cossacks had to abandon most of their supplies during sudden skirmishes. Thin grass sprouted from thawing ground. Cossack horses gnawed bark from the trees. Half-starved on a horse flesh and maize diet, the survivors finally reached the Terek River.<sup>172</sup>

The Volunteer Army's actions created a rift between the Cossacks and the anti-Bolshevik command. While some Cossacks joined the Red Army in an attempt to avoid execution, others determined to keep fighting joined General Nikolai Baratov's Cossack Brigade in Teheran or fled into Georgia. Arriving in the Georgian state, the Cossacks offered their services to Kelech Sultan Hire who organized them into a cavalry regiment. Sent back to the North Caucasus, these units harassed the Reds, raided their supplies, and destroyed roads that the Soviets used to penetrate into the mountains to extend Bolshevik control. In April, officers and cadets that escaped with Wrangel laid plans to return. They hoped to join up with the Cossacks to recreate a Cossack uprising that successfully wiped the Bolsheviks from the Caucasus in 1918. As word spread that Wrangel planned a raid into the Kuban' that summer, Sultan Hire sent the Cossacks back to raise a rebellion. Small Cossack groups with empty rifles maneuvered cautiously towards each other by word of mouth. Although some villages revolted against the Soviets, they failed to unite in sufficient numbers to stage a massive uprising.<sup>173</sup>

On June 6, Wrangel's forces invaded the Tauride steppe through Perekop on the Syvash marshes. By month's end, the anti-Bolsheviks reclaimed the Crimea. On a hot summer night, Wrangel gathered Cossack generals and atamans at a small palace on the Crimean coast. During the evening meal, Wrangel worked to repair frayed relationships. Some leaders, embittered by

<sup>172</sup> Wrangel, 137-138; 13-14; Danchenko, 112; S. A. Malsagoff, *An Island Hell: A Soviet Prison in the Far North* (London: A. M. Philpot, 1926), 13-14, 16.

<sup>173</sup> A. Murphy and F. Patrikeeff, eds., *The Russian Civil War: Primary Sources* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 208; Stephanie Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks and Revolutionaries: Russians in Iranian Military Service, 1800-1920," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 48, no. 2 (2012): 175; Wrangel, 138-140; Malsagoff, 13-14, 16; Albov, 159-165.

their treatment during the evacuation, felt reluctant to try again. The Whites considered the Kuban' Cossacks slow to join the White cause and reluctant to fight later in the war. The anti-Bolsheviks failed to recognize the Cossacks' extreme fatigue and increasing anxiety over fighting so far from their villages. Although the Cossacks still clung to separatist ideas, they now split into two camps. When the Kuban' People's Republic dissolved, most Cossacks recognized the Soviets as a more serious threat than the Whites to their independence.<sup>174</sup>

On August 8, Kuban' Cossack General Sergei Ulagai initiated a mass amphibious landing to place 4,500 officers on the Black Sea coast to meet up with the Kuban' Cossacks hiding in the hills. Around 1,200 officers and Cossacks with two mountain artillery guns under General Aleksandr Cherepov staged a distraction to draw Bolshevik fire so that the main force could land safely. The landing bogged down under heat and hazardous conditions. The officers had no food and little fresh water. The Cossacks that they planned to meet had no ammunition.<sup>175</sup>

Since Cossack atamans in the Kuban' and Ukraine could not break out into the open without weapons, the Whites had to make contact with them. White intelligence officers waded the Dnieper swamps north of Nikopol to find Cossack insurgent bands busy sabotaging Bolshevik transport and cutting Red communication lines. The Cossacks lived a precarious existence on the fringes of villages. Peasants often risked their lives to hide them in their huts. When the Cossacks needed horses, the peasants also freely gave them mounts and trusted their promises to return them. Led by Ataman Vilkorski, who reached out to General Alexander Kutepov for help, the Whites found ten atamans from the Union of Atamans waiting at Teoulik for supplies. Dressed in peasant clothes, the leaders wore revolvers at their hips and long *kindjal* daggers in their belts. They had no sabers or rifles. When the Whites brought twenty-five million

<sup>174</sup> Hodgson, 31-32; Lazarski, 66; Danchenko, 74-75; Wrangel, 167-170.

<sup>175</sup> Wrangel, 63, 258-259; Danchenko, 31; Markov, 95; Albov, 159, 168-169.

rubles in Bolshevik notes, 10,000 in tsarist currency, a few machine guns, and medical supplies, it became clear that these men cared very little for money. Instead, their eyes lit up at the ammunition and medical supplies that would help them continue to resist the Bolsheviks.<sup>176</sup>

The Black Sea woods also hid bands of White Army partisan groups. When Ulagai landed his troops on the coast, a small party moved uphill along a twisting mountain track searching for the Cossacks' meeting place. Due to rumors that large Cossack numbers had rebelled against the Soviets, the White expected to meet around 4,000 Cossacks when they landed. Only about 300-400 Cossacks reached them in time. Near dawn, gunfire burst out on the beach below. When the Whites came ashore, they moved along the same narrow road that the first group navigated the night before. Halfway up the mountain, the Reds attacked. The ambush chopped the White column in half and captured the landing place during a savage battle. Still hoping to merge with the Cossacks to capture the railroad to Novorossiysk, Ulagai went on the offensive. When the Soviets realized that their cavalry failed to wipe out the landing party, they sent the Ninth Army and the Red North Caucasian Army to destroy Ulagai. Blocked and mined escape routes forced the Whites to evacuate the Kuban' coast in a roundabout way and join the main assault force at Kerch. Despite heavy setbacks, the Whites expanded their attacks across the Dnieper River into Alexandrovsk, Zaporizhia, and the Donbas. By September, Ulagai returned to the Crimea while Don Cossacks under Kutepov harried the Reds into a retreat to the north. During the White assault on Kahovka, General Naumenko, the Rada mediator and Kuban' Cossack Field Ataman, went down wounded by shrapnel. As the Whites and Cossacks regrouped, Budyonny's cavalry destroyed Ulagai's forces in less than three weeks.<sup>177</sup>

<sup>176</sup> Mikhail Akulov, "War without Fronts: Atamans and Commissars in Ukraine, 1917-1919," Harvard University, 2013, 23; Kamyshansky, 128, 207, 222, 257; Koehler, "Alexandrovsk Report," 14 October 1920, 162.

<sup>177</sup> Kamyshansky, 254, 256-257; Denikin, 235; Ovcharenko, 72, 87-89; Albov, 172-193; Wrangel, 258-259, 261, 263-264; 294-295; Peter Kenez, *Red Advance, White Defeat*, 117; Ivan Stenbock-Fermor, *Memoirs of Life in*

The war reached a crescendo in the Kuban' by late 1920. On October 12, the Soviets signed a treaty that ended the Russo-Polish war. The Black Army, under Mikhail Frunze, joined the Bolsheviks and enabled them to focus their strength on crushing the Whites. Red numbers on the southern front soared to 146,000 soldiers and 40,000 cavalrymen. Wrangel's army at best mustered 41,000 men. At their last stand in the Crimea, the Whites had 23,000 soldiers and 6,000 Cossacks on the ground. Pushed back to a shrinking foothold, the Whites dug in on the Perekop isthmus. By November, only 10,000 White troops crouched in the trenches on Perekop with their backs to the old Turkish wall. Another 3,000 troops surrounded the Syvash marshes. The rest guarded the army's rear. At night, the Soviets forded the marsh and launched an attack in six successive waves that hurled grenades and blasted General Mikhail Fostikov's Kuban' Cossacks with aircraft fire to wipe out the defenders from above. The attack failed. For the next four days the fight continued as water levels fluctuated in the Syvash. Finally, the Reds broke through the White line. With no other option, Wrangel pulled his army out and evacuated the Crimea.<sup>178</sup>

### **Evacuation**

The anti-Bolsheviks resurrected the White movement against insurmountable odds. Even the Soviets could not believe how bitterly the Whites fought for each foot of Russian soil. "I am amazed at the enormous energy of the enemy's resistance," Frunze admitted to Lev Kamenev. "There is no doubt that he fought more fiercely and stubbornly than any other army would have."<sup>179</sup> The resurgent White movement had failed. The Reds burst into the Crimea. Panic

*Old Russia: World War I, Revolution, and in Emigration* (Berkeley, California: University of California, Bancroft Regional Oral History Office, 1976), 470-471; Albov, 192-193.

<sup>178</sup> Wrangel, 310-315, 326; Markov, 95; Eliseev, *Kornilovskim*, 366, 485; Danchenko, 97; Denikin, 294; The United States War Department, *Weekly Summaries, no. 181, 7 November - 13 November 1920* (New York and London: Garland, 1978), 5,788-5,089; Stenbock-Fermor, 491.

<sup>179</sup> Nikolai N. Azovtsev, ed., *Direktivny komandovania frontov Krasnoĭ Armii, 1917-1922 gg. sbornik dokumentov* (Soviet Union: Voennoe izd-vo, 1974), III:495.

erupted as terrified civilians jostled with sick and wounded men trying to escape. During the winter retreat, many Kuban' Cossacks fought their own war to get back to their *stanitsas*. Men gathered up their wives and children as they fled south. Fighting off Red attacks with dwindling ammunition, they finally reached the coast. British, American, and French vessels sailed around the shoreline, picking up troops at Sevastopol, Yalta, and Feodosia. The American ships had orders to only take soldiers on board if they threw away their weapons. Once more, the last Cossacks covering the Whites' retreat found no place on the steamboats. When Wrangel realized that Fostikov's First Kuban' Division had set out for Kerch rather than to Feodosia where they could evacuate, he rushed General A. K. Abramov to pick them up at the strait. By the evacuation's end, 145,693 people crowded onto the 126 ships that Wrangel had prepared. The refugee army, sick, impoverished, and displaced, landed on the Greek island at Lemnos. Fed and sheltered by the French, the Russian and Cossack exiles became stateless people in a sometimes pitying, sometimes hostile, and often indifferent post-wartime Europe.<sup>180</sup>

### **Outlaws in the Hills**

The Civil War did not end in 1920. With the Armed Forces of South Russia's collapse, the Cossacks left behind turned into hunted wolves. The Whites' defeat did not turn South Russia into a civilian landscape. Moscow's "Secret Report" in spring 1921 still identified the Caucasus as a hostile front. Many Cossacks waged an irregular war against the Bolsheviks into the spring of 1921 and beyond. "The Cossacks could no longer defend themselves on their own land," Trotsky concluded. "We had ourselves bound up their fate with that of the Volunteer army."<sup>181</sup>

<sup>180</sup> Wrangel, 324-327; Koehler, 140; Hodgson, 40-41; Engelstein, 474; Hutchins, n. 4, 1; The United States War Department, *Weekly Summaries*, no. 181, 7 November – 13 November, 1920 (New York and London: Garland, 1978), 5,475, 6004; O'Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 259; Longworth, 308; Robinson, 16.

<sup>181</sup> Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography*, 454.

About 10,000 Cossacks who could not get on the evacuation ships escaped over the border into the Georgian mountains. The sheer terror that roused the Cossacks to rebel against the Bolsheviks and seal off their borders became a daily reality as the Soviets consolidated power in the North Caucasus. Famine stalked the villages. Prisons overflowed. By day, Cossack rebels lay low in the hills. At night, they crept out to nearby villages. Fading in from the dusk, they reached out to friendly villagers who slipped them any food that they could spare. During that winter, the Red Army and Cheka violently crushed Cossack uprisings in the Kuban'. Throughout October 1922, Cossacks carried out organized raids along the Soviet border. In response, the Reds intensified their terror against the population. When local Chekists conducted mass executions, anti-Bolshevik rebels often burst into town and hung all the Soviets in revenge.<sup>182</sup>

By 1923, the Soviets had still not subdued the Kuban'. The Bolsheviks labeled the Cossack partisans as "insurgents" and "bandits" and applied mass terror to stamp out their resistance. In the early twenties, Dunko, a Black Sea Cossack leader, fought till his last bullet when surrounded and then committed suicide to prevent the Reds from capturing him alive. Another Cossack band under a White Army colonel waged a guerilla war with the Soviets in the Kuban' until at least 1926. Some hid among the Circassians in the mountains until the Second World War. Others fought until the Reds controlled the Georgian border and then melted away into Anatolia. After his ambush and death in 1924, Vasyuk, a Cossack officer who carried on his own war with the Bolsheviks, passed into local folklore. As a crowd gathered for Vasyuk's funeral, twenty-five horsemen burst out of the steppe, careened into the cemetery, fired three

<sup>182</sup> Kamyshansky, 128, 207, 222, 257; Albov, 172-173; Serge, *Russia Twenty Years After*, 16-17, 22-23; O'Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 268-269; Longworth, 318-320; Moscow: Secret Report on Military Action Against Bandits, 31 March 1921, Situation Report for March 30, 1921, RTSKhIDNI, fond 17, op. 86, d. 144, ll.5, in Diane P. Koenecker, ed., *Revelations from the Russian Archives: Documents in English Translation* (Washington, D. C.: The Library of Congress, 1997), 31; Kuban' Cossack oral history transcript, Schedule A, vol. 5, case 58, Harvard Refugee Interview Project, 1950, 27; Leggett, 334-335; Malsagoff, 17-20, 23.

volleys over his grave, and then vanished in a cloud of dust.<sup>183</sup>

In the fifth year since the revolution, the Soviets offered amnesty to “politically unconscious” peasants, regular criminals, bandits, and anti-Bolsheviks who came out and registered at the local Cheka headquarters. The Soviets threatened to hunt down anyone that did not appear. Tired, marginalized, and fearing for their family’s safety, some men took the chance. Despite the offer, most White officers and sympathizers did not actually qualify for amnesty. When officers and Cossacks appeared at the Cheka, the Soviets typically imprisoned or shot them on the spot. Cossack children often received years of hard labor or prison due to their social origins.<sup>184</sup> As popular uprising continued throughout the Kuban’ villages, the Bolsheviks made no secret about the savage policies that they applied to the Cossacks. “We gunned down Cossacks officers leading the political gangs,” Anastas Mikoian, a close Stalin associate, reported. “Now we have no gangs.”<sup>185</sup> The Soviets made it clear that they ruled over the North Caucasus as an exploited region and the Cossacks as a conquered people.

<sup>183</sup> Serge, *Russia Twenty Years After*, 16-17, 22-23; Kosok, 53; Kamyshansky, 128, 207, 222, 257; Albov, 172-173; Moscow: Secret Report on Military Action Against Bandits, 31 March 1921, Situation Report for March 30, 1921, RTSKhIDNI, fond 17, op. 86, d. 144, ll.5, in Koeneker, 31; oral history interview, Harvard Refugee Interview Project, no. 395, 1706, 45; Leggett, 334-335; O’Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 268-269; Kuban’ Cossack oral history transcript, Schedule A, vol. 26, case 511, Harvard Refugee Interview Project, 1950, 16; Longworth, 318-320.

<sup>184</sup> Matthew Rendle, “Mercy amid Terror? The Role of Amnesties during Russia’s Civil War,” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 92, no. 3 (July 2014): 458, 464, 475; Vladimir N. Brovkin, “On the Internal Front: The Bolsheviks and the Greens,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, Bd. 37, H. 4 (1989): 551; Malsagoff, 16-17-20, 23; Kuban’ Cossack oral history transcript, no. 119, SH, Harvard Refugee Interview Project, Widener Library, Harvard University, 16; Kuban’ Cossack oral history transcript, Schedule A, no. 58, Harvard Refugee Interview Project, Slavic Division: Widener Library, Harvard University, 27.

<sup>185</sup> O’Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 268-269.



## Decossackization

During the unofficial Civil War period, the Soviet government took steps to ensure that the Cossacks as an ethnic group and independent military force would never rise against the state again. The Soviets not only deported numerous Kuban' Cossacks and filled the void with Soviet citizens, but they enacted a systematic policy of terror and ethnic cleansing, amounting to an unrecognized genocide, called decossackization (*raskazachivaniye*). The Bolsheviks outlawed religious, military, and cultural symbols that might inspire revolt. Soviet laws criminalized non-state religion, destroyed the *voisko* military structure, banned Cossack uniforms, and confiscated weapons. After the Cossack fight failed, the Soviets rounded up and hung most surviving members of the Kuban' Rada.<sup>186</sup> Through systematic hunting, surrounding small bands, cutting off resources and allies, and eliminating resistance leaders in the villages, the Bolsheviks gradually rounded up Cossack insurgent groups. With chilling accuracy, the Soviets identified Cossacks that they suspected had the capability to lead a community revolt. The Bolsheviks summarily executed atamans. They liquidated men and deported women to the Solovetsky Island concentration camps in the far north. Sometimes they shot entire families. In one mass arrest, the Reds sent 1,500 Kuban' Cossack officers to northern labor camps. How many survived the treatment and subzero conditions is unknown. Soviet guards displayed leniency towards criminal prisoners but treated officers with ruthless brutality. Decossackization annihilated the Kuban' Cossack population and stripped the Cossacks of their visible cultural identity.<sup>187</sup>

<sup>186</sup> Government Section no. 146, Harvard University Refugee Interview Project, Widener Library, Harvard University, 18.

<sup>187</sup> Peter Holquist, "Conduct Merciless Mass Terror," 132-133; O'Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 263; Kuban' Cossack oral history transcript, no. 119, Harvard Refugee Interview Project, 16; Anton Popov, "Re-making a Frontier Community or Defending Ethnic Boundaries? The Caucasus in Cossack Identity," *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 64, no. 9 (2012): 1741; Ian Appleby, "Uninvited Guests in the Communal Apartment: Nation-formation Processes among Unrecognized Soviet Nationalities," *Nationalities Papers*, vol 38, no. 6 (November 2010): 847; Shane O'Rourke, "From Region to Nation: The Don Cossacks, 1870-1920," in Remev, von Hagen, Burbank, 232-233; Longworth, 318; Malsagoff, 136, 192, 196; Leggett, 466; Oral history transcript, Schedule B, vol. 7, case 67,

By 1930, Kuban' Cossack identity and resistance remained a faint but persistent echo. The destruction of their freedoms that the Cossacks resisted so desperately became a reality in the decade following the White defeat. When Soviet agents arrived to enforce collectivization in the Kuban', Cossack bandits waylaid them on lonely roads. As the Bolsheviks entered Kuban' *stanitsas* to seize property, grain, and livestock and force the remaining villagers onto collective farms, the Cossack women put up a final fight. One Bolshevik writer reported that in these villages "all the men had been previously arrested."<sup>188</sup> The Soviets dragged the women, "crazy with fear and rage," away from their children and forced them onto trains bound for prison camps in the tundra, Siberian forests, the Narym marshes, and deserts in Kazakhstan.<sup>189</sup>

Although opposition grew weaker and less organized than in previous years, resistance still surfaced in the Don and Kuban' during collectivization. "I would rather burn my grain than give it to the Bolsheviks," one Cossack declared.<sup>190</sup> When Kuban' Cossacks resisted collectivization, the Soviets taxed them until they could no longer survive on the land. Many died from starvation. When families starved or these conditions forced them to sell their farms at a loss, the land reverted to the *kolkhoz* administration.<sup>191</sup> Cossacks who fought through the First World War and the Civil War maintained that they would rather "suffer the agonies of war than to continue living under Soviet rule."<sup>192</sup> Some Cossacks responded to Soviet coercion with their

Harvard Refugee Interview Project, 1950, 20; Serge, *Russia Twenty Years After*, 168; Yurii D. Bezsonov, *My Twenty-Six Prisons and My Escape from Solovetski* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929), 232; George Popoff, *The Tcheka: The Red Inquisition* (London: A.M. Philpot, 1925), 218, 221; Kuban' Cossack oral history transcript, Schedule A, no. 56, Harvard Refugee Interview Project, Widener Library, Harvard University, 1950, 27.

<sup>188</sup> Serge, *Russia Twenty Years After*, 96, 168.

<sup>189</sup> Serge, *Russia Twenty Years After*, 168.

<sup>190</sup> D'Ann R. Penner, "Ports of Access into the Mental and Social Worlds of Don Villagers in the 1920s and 1930s," *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, vol. 40, no. 1-2 (1999): 177-178, 186.

<sup>191</sup> Kuban' Cossack oral history transcript, Schedule A, vol. 13, case 175, Harvard Refugee Interview Project, Slavic Division: Widener Library, Harvard University, 1950, 32; Kuban' Cossack oral history transcript, schedule A, vol. 26, case no. 511, Slavic Division: Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, 1950, 18; Oral history interview, Harvard Refugee Interview Project, no. 395, 1706, 46; O'Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 272-273; Kuban' Cossack oral history transcript, schedule A, vol. 26, case 511, Harvard Refugee Interview Project, 1950, 3.

<sup>192</sup> Penner, 186.

own brand of Cossack *volya*. In 1925, thirty-four Kuban' Cossack men, arrested for failure to pay heavy Soviet taxes, continuously sang hymns and "God Save the Tsar" to the Cheka guards as they sat in prison. Others went silent, simply hoping to survive.<sup>193</sup>

By best records and estimates, the Soviets deported nearly one million Kuban' Cossacks from the North Caucasus and replaced them with Red soldiers during the 1920s. By the 1930s, the Soviets continued to create ruses to bring Cossack separatists out of hiding. In 1936, Stalin proclaimed a free Kuban' Cossack state near Rostov. In response, men put on old, forbidden Cossack uniforms and emerged to celebrate their freedom. Led by a Cossack commander, the soldiers paraded through the streets towards Soviet soldiers stationed in the military review stands who arrested them and exiled them to the arctic north.<sup>194</sup> Following the Civil War, the Cossacks soon became the outsiders and a rapidly dwindling minority in their former land.<sup>195</sup> Those that survived continued to cling to their ethnic identity and the hope for a free Kuban' Cossack state. "We always knew that we were Cossacks," one peasant later insisted.<sup>196</sup>

At the end of the Civil War, the western nations recognized the new state of Georgia as an independent nation but did not legitimize Cossack statehood. As a result, the Georgians could appeal for help against Soviet invasion into their sovereign state and voice their experience at Bolshevik hands. The Cossacks, as a stateless people, could not. After carrying out

<sup>193</sup> Kuban' Cossack oral history interview, no. 119, Harvard Refugee Interview Project, Slavic Division: Widener Library, Harvard University, 1950, 17; Kuban' Cossack oral history transcript, schedule A, vol. 26, case no. 511, Slavic Division: Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, 1950, 17, 19, 25, 33, 35; Longworth, 318; Penner, 186; O'Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 268-269.

<sup>194</sup> Kuban' Cossack oral history interview, no. 355, Harvard Refugee Interview Project, 1950, 50.

<sup>195</sup> Kuban Cossack oral history transcript, Schedule A, no. 57, Harvard Refugee Interview Project, Slavic Division: Widener Library, Harvard University, 1950, 3; Kamyshansky, 227; Kuban' Cossack oral history transcript, schedule A, vol. 26, case no. 511, Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, 1950, 36; O'Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 268-269; Brian J. Boeck, "From the Verge of Extinction to Ethnic Distinction: Cossack Identity and Ethnicity in the Kuban'" Region, 1991-2002," *Ab imperio*, vol. 2004, no. 2 (2004): 617; Longworth, 318.

<sup>196</sup> Kuban' Cossack interview, oral history transcript, Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, Schedule A, vol. 5, case 54, Slavic Division: Widener Library, Harvard University, 1950, 12.

decossackization in the Kuban', the Soviet authorities remarked with satisfaction, "We shot as many Cossacks as Georgians . . . but the Cossacks could not cry out and even if they could no one would have believed them."<sup>197</sup>

### **“The Will of the People”**

The political shockwaves created by the Russian Empire's fall cast long tremors that triggered ethnic minorities to initiate separatist movements during the twentieth century. In the early revolutionary days, the Kuban' Cossacks created an independent state that resulted from conscious ethnic identity rather than an identity void. The revolution created a power gap that allowed Cossack leaders to expand self-rule traditions maintained within the *soslovie* to a national scale. Cossack motivations for state-building represented both particularism and universalism. The Cossacks fought to retain specific estate privileges while universalizing democratic suffrage. In a modern move that also demonstrated historical continuity, Cossack state-building reflected existing autonomous traditions and western self-determination concepts.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a resurgence in Cossack-centrism. Kuban' *voisko* histories reminded Cossacks about their unique Zaporizhian heritage. Many Kuban' Cossacks retained strong ethnic features and visible culture that differentiated them from the Russian people. Unlike the Don, Terek, or Ural Cossacks who spoke Russian, Kuban' Cossacks spoke their own Balachka language. The Cossacks' democratic assemblies and decentralized location on the empire's borders enabled them to nurture a distinctive identity. In the nineteenth century, the Cossacks resisted attempts to impose the *zemstvo* system on them. The *zemstvo* threatened to curb assemblies' ability to vote for themselves and transfer power via delegates from the Cossack military administration to a Russian bureaucratic system. Atamans'

<sup>197</sup> O'Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 268-269, 272.

local authority also increased as the government recognized the need to satisfy Cossack demands for greater self-rule in order to retain their beneficial service to the state.

The Cossacks established a free Kuban' state to enable the North Caucasus people to rule themselves and resolve political, social, and economic issues independent from Russian authority. While state-building demonstrated particularism, it also revealed how Cossack attitudes evolved towards non-Cossacks by the twentieth century. The more that the tsarist state used them for internal control, the more many Cossacks experienced social consciousness. The serious economic issues that military service imposed on the Cossacks and the Cossacks' growing unhappiness at their use as a police force accelerated the estate system into an anachronism. While the government hoped to employ the Cossacks as a conservative bulwark against revolution, Cossack leaders exerted pressure in an opposing liberal direction.

Problems in land and government emerged when the Cossacks and nonresidents failed to develop a viable land program and regional administration. Despite a difficult history with the Caucasians and nonresidents, and their resistance to surrendering corporate land, some Rada members worked to integrate their neighbors into the local political process. The Rada finally found itself in a politically untenable position. The *inogorodnye* generally sided with the Soviets that they believed would award them Cossack lands. Despite sincere initial attempts at a universal democratic process, it proved difficult to satisfy both the Cossack and the nonresident peoples' will because they could not reconcile their opposing goals. This resulted in political polarization and the inability to insulate the North Caucasus from Soviet power.

The Civil War saw a continuing historical pattern in Cossack reactions to a central state. For a moment, full autonomy seemed within reach. Local atamans and village assemblies supported the Cossack independence movement as much as the Kuban' elites. Dedicated to

democratic elections that reflected the people's will, the Rada formed a separate state because each local assembly voted for self-determination. Monolithic Russian nationalism presented a fundamental obstacle to Cossack nationalism and self-rule. The struggle with the anti-Bolsheviks for military and administrative control fatally undermined the separatist movement. The Volunteer leadership relied on Cossack manpower to defeat the Bolsheviks and recreate a united Russian state in ways that violated Cossack democratic values. The Rada refused to recognize Denikin's supreme authority because the Cossacks had not elected him.

When the White movement collapsed, the Cossacks found themselves fighting for vanishing freedoms and their right to exist in a terrifying new world. From the time that the Cossacks emerged as military and ethnic group, the Russian state used them to fight its wars when convenient. As an external threat receded, the government sought to curb the Cossacks as an independent force. The government used the estate system to secure their loyalty and harness the Cossacks' military capabilities to control internal unrest and extend imperial authority into the frontier. The Cossacks' military and economic participation in the estate system created a hiatus in Cossack resistance during the nineteenth century. Despite growing social and economic pressures intensified by military service, the symbiotic relationship between Tsar and Cossack made the Cossacks unlikely to resurface as a hostile force against the tsarist state.

Like the tsarist state before them, the Soviets recognized the Cossacks' potential to provide military support or raise rebellion. The Cossacks clung to prerevolutionary traditions and the old estate structure and largely rejected Soviet attempts to recruit them or alter their lifestyle. A stubborn anti-Bolshevik force that refused to subordinate itself to an authoritarian state could not exist. The Soviets understood how powerfully the Cossacks' sense of homeland roused them to defend it. As a result, the Bolsheviks worked to systematically extinguish the Cossacks'

corporate identity as *Kubantsy* and eradicate a sense of homeland. When the Bolsheviks failed to win the Cossacks over as a group, they destroyed their ethnic entity and military power. The Kuban' Cossacks' ancestry gave them an identity as a people rather than a profession, a fierce devotion to freedom, and stirred them to create an independent state during the Civil War. The Kuban' remained a place solidly grounded in geographical reality. It also represented an imagined space and territory of the spirit. The idea of a free Cossack state persisted in the shadows of Cossack cultural memory into the present day. When Cossack state-building appeared in 1917, it reflected a growing modernity and emerged from a long history of Cossack struggle for self-rule. Resisting any political power that threatened to reduce their independence, the Cossacks remained a paradox in their historically changing relation to the state.

### ***Black Sea, Crimea: November 1920***

Fire flashed from the rooftops above the Crimea coast as Red soldiers poured down the mountains. On a hill above the sea, a group of exhausted Kuban' Cossacks and horses huddled under the faded blue and red Kuban' Republic flag. As the last ships faded in the distance, the Cossacks stared with tired and impassive eyes at the chaos churning below. Months earlier, Ataman Grishin appealed to the Cossacks to rise “for the will of the people, the land, and true, non-communist freedom.”<sup>198</sup> For six years, from the Turkish passes to the Kuban' steppes, they carried on a bloody war against authoritarian powers. That day, the rest of the Cossacks had fled along the Tuapse coast towards the Georgian border. For a moment the men stood motionless as the wind fluttered the tattered Kuban' flag, then they crossed the border out of Russia forever.<sup>199</sup>

<sup>198</sup> Danchenko, 52

<sup>199</sup> Aten, 329.

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