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# WESTERN HISTORIANS OF RUSSIA AND THE CRIMEA:

## WHY DO THEY CONTINUE TO USE IMPERIALIST AND RACIST FRAMEWORKS?

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# Western Historians of Russia and the Crimea: Why Do They Continue to Use Imperialist and Racist Frameworks?

Taras Kuzio

*“The Crimean Peninsula is the heartland of Russian nationhood. It was here in Khersones that Prince Vladimir adopted Orthodoxy as the official religion of the peoples of Rus.”*

**Richard Sakwa<sup>1</sup>**

*“Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptised. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilisation and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.”*

**President Vladimir Putin<sup>2</sup>**

Western scholars writing about “Russian” history continue to use Russian imperial historical frameworks that were used prior to the disintegration of the USSR. Although a Russian nation-state emerged in 1992 and has been independent for over a quarter of a century there are no histories of the Russian Federation. Since the late 1980s, Western historians of Ukraine, such as Orest Subtelny, Paul R. Magocsi, Serhiy Plokyh, Serhiy Yekelchyk, and George Liber, have adopted this approach.<sup>3</sup> Western histories of “Russia” thereby continue to ignore its territorial limitations by conflating empire with nation-state. In doing so they subsume Ukrainians within “Russian” history and Crimea is viewed as always being “Russian.” Western historians of “Russia” have not adapted to the emergence of an independent Russia by using standard Western frameworks whereby the histories of countries are the territories of nation-states. The history of France and Great Britain, for example, includes all events that took place within the internationally recognised boundaries of these nation-states.

Magosci's two editions of *A History of Ukraine* uses a civic-territorial approach to Ukrainian history where, instead of focusing upon ethnic Ukrainians, it attempts to encapsulate all of the events and peoples who have lived, and still live, on Ukrainian territory. Magosci's *A History of Ukraine* surveys 2,500 year of history of Ukrainians and other peoples (Greeks, Crimean Tatars, Poles, Russians, Jews, Germans, Hungarians and Romanians) living within the borders of the Ukrainian nation-state. Western histories of "Russia" and Ukraine, and histories of Ukraine published since 1991 in Ukraine, are incompatible with one another.<sup>4</sup> Histories of Ukraine are no different to standard European histories of states that cover all of the events that took place within the territory of the Ukrainian nation-state. Ignoring European civic approaches, Western histories of "Russia" continue to use an imperialist framework and are similar to Russian politicians who do not equate "Russia" with the Russian Federation (as seen at the beginning of this paper). These histories of "Russia" expropriate history that took place on Ukrainian territory for "Russian" history. Instead of histories of the Ukrainian and Russian Federation there continues to be "Russian" history with Ukrainians as an accident of history who appear from time to time but are always eager to re-embrace Moscow. Pal Kolsto writes that Western historians backed their Russian colleagues over questions such as the "ownership" of Kyivan Rus and utilised Russian imperialist historiography: "Western historians have generally accepted the Russian time perspective."<sup>5</sup>

#### UKRAINIAN PERSPECTIVES DERIDED AS "NATIONALISTIC"

The incorporation of a Russian imperialist framework into Western histories of "Russia" was, and remains the norm and was never viewed as a manifestation of imperial thinking. Historical alternatives published by Ukrainian émigrés were derided as "nationalistic." Kolsto writes, "true enough, certain emigre Ukrainian historians have always maintained that this was a theft of the history of the Ukrainian people, but most of their Western colleagues have brushed these objections aside, dismissing them as rather pathetic manifestations of Ukrainian nationalism."<sup>6</sup> Nicholas V. Riasanovsky's well known *A History of Russia*, for example, made only one reference to Mykhaylo Hrushevskyy when briefly discussing the Zaporozhzhian Cossacks.<sup>7</sup> Usually, when

Hrushevskyy was mentioned by Western historians it was to deride him as someone providing a “nationalistic viewpoint.”<sup>8</sup> Histories of Ukraine were derided as “nationalistic” by the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian regimes *and* by Western historians of “Russia.” Meanwhile, historians who always used imperialist historiography were lauded as “objective.” This was surely fake news long before the appearance of social media and Russia Today.

In continuing to use Russian imperialist historiography, Western historians and political experts on Russia have become apologists for Russian imperialism in the Crimea. Russia’s annexation of the Crimea in spring 2014 was “normalised” by Western historians and political experts on Russia by claiming the Crimea had “always been “Russian.” In supporting Russian President Vladimir Putin’s imperialism, they had to air brush out the Tatar claim to be the indigenous people of the Crimea. By taking this road they are treading on dangerous territory because an argument claiming white settlers were the indigenous peoples in North and South America, Australia or New Zealand would be condemned as racist. Claiming Russians are the indigenous people of the Crimea is no different. Western histories of “Russia” therefore treat Ukrainians as a branch of the “Russian” people and Tatars as not the indigenous First Nations of the Crimea. De-colonisation of Western history writing of “Russia” is long overdue.

#### WESTERN HISTORIES OF “RUSSIA” ARE IMPERIALIST

Western historians working in conditions of academic freedom were free to pursue the study of “Russian history” in as objective a manner as is possible. Nevertheless, Western histories of imperial Russia and the former USSR usually portrayed it as a homogenous nation-state rather than as a multinational empire. Mark von Hagen wrote, “Certainly, no mainstream Russian historian ever described the empire as such; rather, they chose to write the history of Russia more or less as the history of a nation-state, or at least one in the making.”<sup>9</sup> Western histories of “Russia” unconsciously followed the assumption previously laid out by Tsarist officials that nationality policy should be tailored to create a “nation-state” from the Russian empire. This, in turn, could only be undertaken by assuming that Ukrainians and Belarusians were also

“Russians” – as Russian President Vladimir Putin repeatedly asserts. Tsarist policies and Russian historiography were patently misplaced and could only be premised upon a denial of any history for Ukrainians and Belarusians separate to Russian. As Theodore R. Weeks argues, “And yet the Russian Empire was not, and could not be, a nation-state. Any effort to make the Russian Empire into a national state was doomed to failure.”<sup>10</sup>

Attempts to transform the Tsarist Russian empire into a “nation-state” modelled on Germany and based on the core “Russian” (Russkii understood as encompassing three eastern Slavs) peoples assumed three factors. Firstly, that Ukrainians and Belarusians were “ethnographic raw material” and simply regional ethnoses of the larger Russkii people.<sup>11</sup> That is, they were simply “Little” or “White Russians”— not separate nations. The only choice, therefore, given to Ukrainians and Belarusians by the Tsarist authorities was to become Russians or less favourably Poles. Secondly, the non-Slavic peoples of the Tsarist empire would agree to assimilation into this planned “Russian nation-state” or enter into “voluntary union” with it. This policy, supported by Tsarist officials and all non-left-wing political parties, rejected any group rights (cantons, autonomy or federalisation) for the empire. In the Russian civil war, all Russian political groups (including the liberal Kadets [Constitutional Democrats]) opposed Ukrainian autonomy or independence.<sup>12</sup>

Thirdly, writing “Russian” history as that which equates empire with nation-state, “Russian” with the eastern Slavs, would be the equivalent of German nationalists and Nazis claiming prior to World War II that the “German World” includes Prussia, Germany, Bavaria, Austria, Switzerland and parts of France, Italy, Czechoslovakia and Poland. A “German World” encompassing an area that belonged to “German civilisation” would be the equivalent of the *Russkii Mir (Russian World)* covering Orthodox and Slavic civilisation in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. France, Spain and Great Britain both have links to Rome and the Roman empire, but their histories are confined to the borders of the nation-states created during the past two centuries. This should be the model for the Russian Federation with its origins in the Novgorod Republic, Vladimir-Suzdal, and Muscovy, rather than Kyivan Rus. The pre-1945 German World

and contemporary *Russkii Mir* are never equated because the former is seen as belonging to the evils of Nazism while the latter is not viewed as extremist but merely as bringing together three “fraternal” branches of the “Russian” people. But, what happens if one “branch” of the “Russian” people - Ukrainians – seek to break free and build a future outside Putin’s *Russkii Mir*?

The dissemination of a historiography which viewed the Russian empire as a “nation-state” was influenced by Michael Karpovich at Harvard University which, “shaped the post-war generation of Russian historians in North America and Europe.”<sup>13</sup> Two surveys of “Russian history” by Russian emigres Michael Florinsky and Riasanovsky were influential in Western historiographies of “Russia.”<sup>14</sup> Riasanovsky surveys “Russian history” from “Kievan Russia” to “Soviet Russia” as one continuous narrative of the “Russians.” “Kievan Russia” is therefore described as the “first Russian state” and the region geographically coined as “southern Russia” which spoke the “Old Russian language.”<sup>15</sup> Although Riasanovsky admits the term “Russian” was coined much later, he nevertheless applies it to the medieval Kyivan Rus, while only briefly mentioning Ukraine during the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries. Riasanovsky’s terminological confusion is evident when he discusses the division of the eastern Slavs into three nations after the disintegration of Kyiv Rus. Riasanovsky, in the tradition of Soviet, post-Soviet and Western historiographies, describes Kyivan Rus as a united state of eastern Slavs whose unity was only broken because of the Mongol invasion. Viewed in such a framework, Ukrainians and Belarusians are accidents of history and their “natural” state is to be in union with Russians.

Vladimir Volkoff begins his history of Russia with the phrase, “... Russia begins with Vladimir the baptist and ends with Vladimir the apostate?”<sup>16</sup> “Holy Russia” was only to be later artificially divided into fifteen republics. Another similarly poor use of methodology is by John Lawrence who writes that his book is, “about the Russian people, not about their neighbours”.<sup>17</sup> The Kyivan era is described as “the cradle of Russia” (a phrase similar to that of Sakwa’s and Putin’s) with its “famous Russian black earth” and “first Russian farmers.” “Southern Russia” is where the “Russians” first entered history in the seventh century, and the region where the “Russian

religion” was established. This would be perfectly at home with Putin’s and the *Russkii Mir* understanding of “Russia.” The imperialist school of “Russian history” is once again clearly reflected in James H. Billington who writes of “Russian culture” as the tale of three cities—Kyiv (the “mother of Russian cities”), Moscow (“the heart”) and St Petersburg (“the head”).<sup>18</sup> We read about “early Russians,” “Kievan Russia,” “Russian soil,” “Old Russia,” the “Russian language” and “Russian theology.”<sup>19</sup> Basil Dmytryshyn and Janet Martin incorporate Kyiv Rus within “Russia history” with the Kyivan legacy transferred to Vladimir/Suzdal and then to Moscow and St Petersburg.<sup>20</sup> Martin writes, “In the year 980, an obscure prince landed on the northern shores of a land that became known as Rus” and later, Russia.” The transfer of “Russian” history from Kyiv Rus has its origins in the imperialist Russian school of history expounded by nineteenth century historians Sergey M.Solovyov and Vasily O. Kliuchevskiy. Martin only devotes four lines to the alternative view propounded by the Ukrainian historian Hrushevskyy. Martin claims “Kievan Rus” and Muscovy were “inextricably, if paradoxically, linked” but nevertheless he adds, “Muscovy’s political structures contrasted sharply with those of Kievan Rus.”<sup>21</sup>

Lionel Kochan uses the term “Kievan Rus” to refer to the medieval era, but includes it within a survey of “Russian history” because this period represented, “the formative centuries of Russian history ...”<sup>22</sup> Florinsky also follows the standard Russian imperialist historiography with Kyiv Rus the first “Russian state” covering “the first three centuries of Russian history” in the “fertile regions of southern Russia.”<sup>23</sup> Florinsky writes, similar to all Western historians of “Russia,” that after the disintegration of Kyiv Rus, “Russian history” divided into two directions which led to the “territorial distribution of the three chief divisions of the Russian people ...”<sup>24</sup> Western history writing of “Russia” has never believed there has been a need to adapt to the disintegration of the former USSR and the formation of an independent Russian state. Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard continued to write: “This book is and is not an account of the emergence of a thing called Russia. The further we pursue the thing into the past, the more misleading our modern vocabulary becomes ...If we picture Russia as a state inhabited mainly by people who think of themselves as Russians—if, that is, our notion of Russia is coloured by



current political or ethno-cultural geography—then most of this book is not about Russia at all, or at least not about Russia alone.”<sup>25</sup> Their book is the first volume of Longman’s *History of Russia* where Kyiv Rus is understood to be the first “Russian” state.

Geoffrey Hosking aims to break new ground by focusing upon how “Rossiia obstructed the flowering of Rus” or, “if you prefer it, how the building of an empire impeded the formation of a nation.”<sup>26</sup> Hosking differentiates Rus/Russkii, the people, from Rossiiski, the empire in order to separate the pre-imperial state and imperial Russian Empire into two distinct objects of study to show how the growth of the Russian empire (Rossiia) obstructed the evolution of the pre-imperial Rus into a nation. Hence, “my story concerns above all the Russians.” Hoskings also therefore treats the people living in Kyiv Rus as “Russians.” Hosking does not attempt to deal with a secondary problem, namely, Russia’s Russkii problem, as Russia has not one but two conundrums: Russkii versus Rossiiski and inter-Russkii. Writing about the Russkii as encompassing the three eastern Slavic peoples is historically wrong, intellectually confusing and serves to perpetuate Russian imperialist views of Russians and Ukrainians constituting, as Putin loves to say, “odyn nard” (one people). Implicit in Hosking’s writing is that Rus constituted one united entity that would have evolved into a Russian nation-state if only its unity had not been destroyed by the Mongol invasion. Ukrainians and Belarusians would have presumably never emerged. Hosking and other Western historians of “Russia” cannot explain how “Russians,” who allegedly happened to live in today’s Ukraine in the medieval era, were then replaced by “Ukrainians” at an undisclosed later stage. Hosking, typically for many Western historians of “Russia,” belittles the Belarusians who do not seem to know who they are. He also repeats the canard about the alleged division of Ukrainians into the “nationalist, Ukrainian-speaking west” and the “pro-Russian, Russian-speaking east and south.”<sup>27</sup> Such a depiction of Ukrainians is also commonly used in Moscow to allege that most Ukrainians seek to remain within the *Russkii Mir*. This poor analysis of Ukrainian national identity lay behind Putin’s assumption that Ukraine’s Russian speakers would support Russian intervention in “Novorossiia” (eastern-southern Ukraine) in spring 2014. Western historians of “Russia,” as much as Russian politicians, cannot comprehend why Russian speakers are Ukrainian patriots, who do not want

to be part of Putin's *Russkii Mir*. 60% of Ukrainian soldiers fighting Putin's proxies in the Donbas are Russian speakers and the neighbouring Dnipropetrovsk region has the highest Ukrainian number of military casualties.

The *Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Russia and the Former Soviet Union*, edited by Archie Brown, Michael Kaiser and Gerald S. Smith, includes no separate section devoted to any non-Russian republic of the former USSR. The authors, typically of Western historians, confuse and use interchangeably the terms "Russia," "Russian empire" and the "USSR." "Russia" and "Russian" are interchanged with "imperial Historiography" throughout the Encyclopaedia.<sup>28</sup> Kyiv Rus is again called "Kievan Russia" with everything to do with it termed "Russian." A similar approach is undertaken by the *Concise Columbia Encyclopaedia* which describes Kyiv as the capital city of "Kievan Russia" which was allegedly the "earlier forerunner of Russia and the USSR." The *Concise Columbia Encyclopaedia* admits that Kyiv Rus included all of present-day Ukraine and Belarus and only north-western Russia, but this does not influence its conflation of Kyiv Rus into "Russian" history. Martin Gilbert's *Atlas of Russian History* was reprinted in 1993 with only minor revisions to the modern period to take into account the disintegration of the USSR.<sup>29</sup> The *Atlas of Russian History* spans "Russian history" from 800 BC to the present through the prism of the standard translation of "Russian statehood" from "Kievan Russia," Vladimir-Suzdal and Muscovy to Peter the Great's Russian Empire. Anything to do with the pre-Vladimir-Suzdal era (economics, territory, religion), is termed "Kievan Russia" and the inhabitants of this state are "Russians."

John Channon's and Robert Hudson's *Penguin Historical Atlas of Russia* utilises the same imperialist framework with its opening chapter entitled "The Origins of Russia."<sup>30</sup> Channon and Hudson interchange between using "Kievan Russia" and "Kievan Rus" in a manner which leads one to assume that they believe them to be one and the same; that is, they were populated by "Russians." The history of Rus is therefore assumed to be part of "The Origins of Russia" which allegedly Christianised itself in 988. This is also what Putin believed and, in both cases, it is historically inaccurate. The Soviet state commemorated the millennium of "Russian"

Christianity in Moscow in 1988 in a city which did not exist until nearly two centuries after Christianity arrived in Kyiv and six centuries after the founding of the city of Kyiv itself. Kyiv celebrated its 1500<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1982. Putin subscribes to this mythological history of “Russia” and in November 2016, a 17-metre monument to Kyiv Rus Grand Prince Volodymyr (Vladimir) the Great was unveiled in Moscow. Volodymyr ruled Kyiv Rus from 980–1015 which was long before the first reference to Moscow in 1147 as a minor town lying on the western border of the principality of Vladimir-Suzdal. In continuing to use an imperialist history of “Russia,” Western historians are in agreement with Russian nationalists such as Putin about “Kiev Russia” as being the first stage of “Russian” history. They are equally as confused about why Ukrainians stubbornly refuse to follow Belarusians as a branch of the Russkii people. This confusion is even more the case since the 2014 crisis which has widened the gulf between Ukrainian and Russian national identities. Their confusion will only grow as the Ukraine-Russia divorce that began in 1992 and speeded up after 2014 is irreversible.<sup>31</sup>

#### WESTERN HISTORIES OF THE CRIMEA ARE RACIST

Current debates about whether monuments to racists, imperialists and those who committed crimes against humanity against native peoples have had no impact upon Western historians of “Russia” and Russian politics experts. It would be impermissible to write a history of any country in North and South America, Australia and New Zealand in the manner as histories of “Russia” are continued to be written? where European settlers are depicted as the “indigenous” people. Australian Labour opposition leader Bill Shorten reminded his fellow Australians that “Our history didn’t start when Captain Cook sailed into sight of Australia in 1770.”<sup>32</sup> If the approach of Western scholars on “Russian history” were used in the Americas, it would mean their history began when European colonists arrived in the 15th and 16th centuries and its peoples could no longer be called “First Nations” and “Native Peoples.” If scholars and journalists wrote that European settlers who landed in 1607–1608 in Virginia and Quebec were “native peoples” they would be rightly accused of racism. Yet, Russian and

Western historians and Russian politicians continue to describe “Russians” as the “native people” of the Crimea.

Adding to Western and Russian racism towards Crimean Tatars is a continued unwillingness to accept that Russian rule over the Crimea has been disastrous for the indigenous Crimean Tatars, in the same manner as European settlers were for First Native and indigenous peoples in North and South America, Australia and New Zealand. In these continents and countries, First Native and indigenous peoples experienced forced assimilation, the taking away of their children from parents, destruction of cultures and genocide. The history of British colonial rule over Australia, “is steeped in the blood of violent dispossession, of attempted genocide, of enduring trauma.”<sup>33</sup> Canada is seeking to redress its mistreatment and abuses of Canada’s indigenous Inuit, First Nations and Metis. Museums and school history textbooks no longer portray European settlers arriving in an empty Canadian land. Prime Ministers have publicly apologised for past mistreatment of First Nations and describe them as Canada’s indigenous people.<sup>34</sup> Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said “The impact of European settlement on Aboriginals was tragic, of course it was. There are many wrongs that were done in the past which we seek to right today.”<sup>35</sup> Australian First Nation indigenous people react to the official Australia Day on 26 January each year with an “uneasy blend of melancholy approaching outright grief, of profound despair, of opposition and antipathy, and always of staunch defiance.”<sup>36</sup> 60,000 marched in Melbourne and hundreds of thousands throughout Australia calling for Australia Day to be changed to a different date in order not to celebrate the day in 1788, only five years after the Crimea was annexed, when British settlers arrived. The marchers called for an end to the “racist” holiday and chanted “no pride in genocide.”<sup>37</sup> Well-known film actor Russell Crowe called for the replacement of the Australia Day holiday with an inclusive annual commemoration: “Take away the contention, let’s have a date we can all embrace.”<sup>38</sup> Tatars have two similar days of genocide committed against them: 10 May 1944 when they were ethnically cleansed and 28 February 2014 when Russia launched its invasion of the Crimea. Continents and countries that have experienced European settlers are coming to terms with their past racism, exploitation, assimilation, and genocide of First Nation indigenous

peoples. Centre-left, liberal and green governments are seeking to redress past crimes. All political forces, including on the centre-right, describe the indigenous native peoples as First Nations.

## THE TATAR GENOCIDE

How does the situation look like in the Crimea? Russian rule over the Crimea included all of the elements found in white settler rule of the America's, Australia and New Zealand. 200,000 of the 300,000 Crimean Tatars emigrated to Ottoman Turkey in the nineteenth century. In the Crimea they were subjected to racism, ethnic and religious discrimination, assimilationist policies and in 1944, ethnic cleansing to Soviet Central Asia. The ethnic cleansing of Crimean Tatars, in May 1944, is commemorated as a genocide by Tatars each year, because half of them perished during the deportation.<sup>39</sup> Since 2014, Russian occupation authorities in the Crimea have revived Soviet era repressive policies of imprisonment, closing down of Tatar institutions (such as the unofficial parliament Majlis), destruction of Tatar culture, deportations, and expulsion of Tatar leaders and abduction and possible murder of up to seventeen Crimean Tatar activists.<sup>40</sup> Crimean Tatar leader Akhtem Chygoz was sentenced to eight years imprisonment by Russian occupation authorities.<sup>41</sup> How have successive Soviet and Russian political leaders and parties, and their proxies in Ukraine (Party of Regions, Communist Party) related to these crimes?

- These political leaders and parties support the 1944 Soviet ethnic cleansing by buying into Joseph Stalin's claim that it was justified because they had "collaborated" with the Nazis.
- They have no remorse for the suffering inflicted upon Crimean Tatars.
- They oppose the return of Crimean Tatars to the Crimea and the return of their stolen property and other assets.
- They claim that the Crimea was always and is "Russian" and deny that Tatars are the indigenous people.

- They continue to hold a racially constructed white European superiority towards “backward” and “Muslim interlopers.”

In presenting the Crimea as “always Russian,” Western historians and experts on Russian politics have depicted Crimean history in a racist manner by excluding, marginalising, or ignoring the indigenous Crimean Tatars. Their pre-occupation with claiming the Crimea as “Russian” has led to them muting and denying the new round of human rights violations and crimes committed against Crimean Tatars. In Western books written about the 2014 crisis, repression of Crimean Tatars is marginalised or downplayed by apologists and some experts on Russian politics. Sakwa makes the incredible claim that Crimean Tatars “welcomed the reunification with Russia” and that “Crimean Tatars are ready to be loyal citizens of Russia.”<sup>42</sup> Racism seems to be compatible with his left-wing views.<sup>43</sup> The Crimea “was always Russian” is a common refrain of Western historians of “Russia.” But, a major question arises as to whether we should start the clock ticking in 1783 and buying into the racist claim the Crimea was an empty land prior the arrival of “Russians.” Canadians, Americans, Australians, and other white settler countries also built museums and published textbooks with a similar claim that the Europeans had arrived in an empty land, but these have been long replaced by greater inclusivity incorporating indigenous First Nations. University of Toronto Chair of Ukrainian Studies Professor Magocsi says the only people who can claim to be indigenous to the Crimea are Tatars.<sup>44</sup> Western and Russian scholars and Russian politicians continue to use an imperialist approach to “Russian” history and a racist exclusion of indigenous Crimean Tatars.

Magocsi and Andrew Wilson both point out that if length of time within a state is the criterion we use to decide to whom Crimea should belong, then it should be returned to Tatars who ruled the peninsula from the thirteenth to the late eighteenth century. For the longest period of time of approximately 330 years the Crimea was within the Crimean Khanate, a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire. The Slavic (Russian and Ukrainian) population of the Crimea only arrived in the nineteenth century. Magocsi says, “This means Slavs (including Russians) cannot be considered the indigenous inhabitants of the Ukrainian steppe and certainly not of the

Crimea.” Magocsi continues: “Therefore, pride of place as the population which has lived longest in Crimea goes to the Tatars.”<sup>45</sup> The Crimea, Magocsi says, is the historic homeland of Tatars – not Russians. Wilson calculates that the Crimea, although annexed by Russia in 1783, “was only ever truly Russian from the Crimean War of 1853-56 until 1917” and again from 1945-54; that is, it was under Russian rule for seventy-three years. The Crimea was a Soviet republic from 1921 to 1945. The Crimea was within Soviet and independent Ukraine for a slightly shorter period of sixty years from 1954-2014; that is, only thirteen years less than it was included within “Russia.”<sup>46</sup>

A second manner in which the Crimea is depicted as “always Russian” is through the continued use of an imperialist history that includes the Crimea as part of “Kiev Russia” as the first stage of “Russian” history. Plokhy has written how Russian imperial identity was forged during Muscovy’s expansionism when it asserted “myths of origins” by laying historical, ideological and dynastic claims to Kyiv Rus.<sup>47</sup> Muscovite Tsars and contemporary Russian presidents claimed descent from Kyiv Rus Grand Princes as the birthplace of the “Russian” state. As part of this mythology they claimed Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians are branches of the “Russian” people. Moscow, the “Third Rome,” became the successor to Constantinople which had fallen to the Ottoman Turks. This imperialist history became – and remains - the norm for Western historians when writing about “Russia” and the Crimea.

#### HOW RUSSIA BLOCKED THE EMERGENCE OF A UKRAINIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

Muscovy and the Tsarist Russian Empire sought to block the emergence of Ukrainian national identity. The Ukrainian language was the only one to be banned in Tsarist Empire in the nineteenth century.<sup>48</sup> Ukrainian identity was being repressed in the Tsarist Empire while it was being promoted in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. “Ukrainian nationalism” was viewed as a threat because it undermined Russian claims to Kyiv Rus and destroyed the myth of three branches of the “Russian” people.<sup>49</sup> Anne Applebaum discusses the origins of Chekist Ukrainophobia in the early 1930s during the *Holodomor* and mass arrest of national

communists, educators and cultural elites. This took place amid a frenzied search for “Petlurite counter-revolutionaries” allied to external enemies of the Soviet Union.<sup>50</sup> Stalin and Putin both talked of their fear of “losing” Ukraine. Paranoia about Ukrainian nationalism, “was taught to every successive generation of secret policemen, from the OGPU to the NKVD to the KGB, as well as every successive generation of party leaders. Perhaps it even helped mould the thinking of post-Soviet elite, long after the USSR ceased to exist.”<sup>51</sup>

Neil Kent’s otherwise informative and balanced history of the Crimea writes that the referendum “was joyfully received by most Crimeans.” He continues: “There is no doubt that the majority of the population of Crimea supported joining the Russian Federation.”<sup>52</sup> Kent repeats the widely held view amongst Western historians of Russia and many experts on Russian politics that the “reunion” of Crimea and Russia returned the peninsula to its “natural” home. Imperialist thinking permeates even left-wing scholars, such as Sakwa and Chris Kaspar de Ploeg. De Ploeg, who supports Russia’s “natural” ownership of the Crimea and does not acknowledge the Tatars as the indigenous First Nation of the Crimea, writes, “Indeed, Crimea has been a part of Russia for 170 years, much longer than its history as a Ukrainian province,”<sup>53</sup> misunderstanding that Ukrainians do not quarrel with Russia over the Crimea and instead support the Crimean Tatars as the indigenous First Nations in their Crimean homeland. Kent describes Crimea as the “Cinderella of the Ukrainian state”<sup>54</sup> in a phrase that could be also repeated for a “Russian Cinderella.” Russia claims proprietorial rights over the Crimea because it had allegedly belonged to “Kievan Russia.” Putin’s imperialism and racism emerged in 2007 with the launch of *Russkii Mir* which elaborates a common, “fraternal” and ever-lasting Slavic and (Russian) Orthodox “civilisation” for Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians. This was further crystallised during the 1020<sup>th</sup> and 1025<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the adoption of Christianity by Kyiv Rus in 2008 and 2013 respectively. During those two anniversaries, Putin was invited by his Ukrainian satrap, President Viktor Yanukovich, to participate in celebrations organised by the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

Putin described Crimea as part “of our shared history” and the location where “Vladimir” was baptised which, “predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilisation and human value



that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.” Putin’s renewed emphasis on the “fraternal” and “irrevocable unity” of the three eastern Slavic peoples and thus Ukraine’s destiny as lying within the *Russkii Mir* therefore predates the 2014 crisis by many years. Sakwa writes that the Crimea was “the heartland of Russian nationhood.”<sup>55</sup> In so doing, he openly buys into Putin’s imperialist historiography of whitewashing Ukrainians from history by referring to the Crimea as part of “Kiev Russian” history. The Russian Orthodox Church and President Putin persistently highlight the eternal “fraternal” bonds of Russians and Ukrainians, stretching from “Kievan Russia” to the present. Ukraine as the origin of “Russian” civilisation was clearly laid out in Putin’s 18 March 2014 speech to the State *Duma* and Federation Council welcoming Crimea’s accession to the Russian Federation. In March 2014, during the official celebrations to incorporate the Crimea into the Russian Federation, Putin said:

“To understand the reason behind such a choice it is enough to know the history of Crimea and what Russia and Crimea have always meant for each other. Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptised. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilisation and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea. This is also Sevastopol – a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet. Crimea is Balaklava and Kerch, Malakhov Kurgan and Sapun Ridge. Each one of these places is dear to our hearts, symbolising Russian military glory and outstanding valour.”

Putin continued:

“After the revolution, the Bolsheviks, for a number of reasons – may God judge them – added large sections of the historical South of Russia to the Republic of Ukraine. This was done with no consideration for the ethnic make-up of the population, and today these

areas from the southeast of Ukraine. Then, in 1954, a decision was made to transfer Crimean Region to Ukraine, along with Sevastopol, despite the fact that it was a federal city. But on the whole – and we must state this clearly, we all know it – this decision was treated as a formality of sorts because the territory was transferred within the boundaries of a single state. Back then, it was impossible to imagine that Ukraine and Russia may split up and become two separate states.”<sup>56</sup>

Kent, believing that popular sentiment in the Crimea was “Russian,” writes, “There is no doubt that the majority of the population of Crimea supported joining the Russian Federation.”<sup>57</sup> However, there can be no doubt the official referendum result of 97% in support of joining the Crimea with the Russian Federation was falsified and the OSCE and Council of Europe refused to accept the validity of a referendum result undertaken at gun point. Tatars and Ukrainians accounted for 36% in Ukraine’s 2001 census and many of them did not support Russia’s annexation in spring 2014. It is also impossible to accept that Sergei Aksyonov, who was installed by Russian troops as Crimean Prime Minister, was a popular political figure. In the 2010 elections, Aksyonov’s neo-Nazi Russian Unity party, which harbours racist and xenophobic attitudes towards Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians, won only 4% of the vote. Aksyonov is also dogged by allegations of links to organised crime with a *nom de guerre* of “Goblin.”<sup>58</sup>

#### TOWARDS NON-IMPERIAL AND NON-RACIST HISTORIES OF RUSSIA

After 1934, Soviet historiography reverted to its pre-Soviet roots and re-adopted the imperialist schema created in the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries. This imperial framework was also followed by Western historians of “Russia.” In Tsarist, Soviet? and Western histories of “Russia” the medieval state of Kyiv Rus was nationalised on behalf of “Russian” history and described as the “first Russian state.” Ukrainians and Belarusians were ignored and only appeared briefly in the mid-seventeenth century as Cossacks who allied themselves with Muscovy and then again in 1917. It was never made clear how Ukrainians came to be living on territory that had been “primordial Russian” territory unless one believed, as does Putin and Russian leaders, that there

are no Ukrainian people and there are three “branches” of the “Russian” people. Since 1992, Russia’s first nation-state should become the basis for a new history of Russia based upon the territory of the Russian Federation. This civic-territorial approach would support Russia’s democratisation by dropping imperialist and racist approaches to history. In the post-Soviet era, imperialist and racist Tsarist, Soviet and Western histories of “Russia” are out of step with the times.<sup>59</sup>

Following the disintegration of the USSR, historians should write new histories of Russia which are confined to the territorial boundaries of the Russian Federation. Instead, by continuing to utilise eighteenth–nineteenth century imperialist and racist approaches, Western and Russian historians support the mythology underpinning Russian territorial claims to the Crimea and “*Novorossiia*,” and Russian hegemony over a Ukraine that “naturally” belongs to the *Russkii Mir*. This approach defines Russians - not Tatars – as the so-called “indigenous” people of the Crimea. A history of Russia territorially based upon the Russian Federation would accomplish three tasks. Firstly, it would no longer equate the Russian empire with a budding Russian nation-state. Secondly, it would no longer incorporate Belarusians and Ukrainians within “Russian” history. “Russian” history that incorporates the three eastern Slavs treats Ukrainians, Russians and Belarusians as organically close and destined to forever live in “fraternal brotherhood.” Thirdly, it would support civic Russian nation building within the borders of the Russian Federation. Vera Tolz found that civic nation building in the Russian Federation is weak<sup>60</sup> and Hosking writes that a civic definition of Russian identity “runs counter to Russian traditions” and “It is historically very weakly grounded.”<sup>61</sup> By supporting an imperialist approach to history, Western historians make a Russian civic identity even weaker. In the twenty-first century, and a quarter of a century after the USSR disintegrated, it is incumbent upon Western historians to end their use of an imperialist historiography. Imperialist historical writing leads to chauvinism towards Ukrainians and racism towards Crimean Tatars that should have no place in the twenty first century.

## **Biography Taras Kuzio**

Taras Kuzio received a BA in Economics from the University of Sussex, an MA in Area Studies (USSR-Eastern Europe) from the University of London, and a PhD in Political Science from the University of Birmingham, England. Currently he is a Fellow at the Center for Transatlantic Relations, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington DC. He has held positions at the University of Alberta, George Washington University, University of Toronto, and Chief of Mission to the NATO Information and Documentation Office in Kyiv, Ukraine. Taras Kuzio is the author and editor of 17 books, including (with Paul D'Anieri) *The Sources of Russia's Great Power Politics: Ukraine and the Challenge to the European Order*, (2018), *Putin's War Against Ukraine. Revolution, Nationalism, and Crime*, (2017), *Ukraine, Democratization, Corruption and the New Russian Imperialism*, (2015), *From Kuchmagate to Orange Revolution*, (2009), and *Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives on Nationalism*, (2007). He is the author of five think tank monographs, including *The Crimea: Europe's Next Flashpoint?* (2010). Taras Kuzio is the author of 38 book chapters and 100 scholarly articles on Ukrainian and post-communist politics, democratic transitions, colour revolutions, nationalism, and European studies.

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