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## Radio Meydan: “Eastern Music” and the Liminal Sovereign Imaginaries of Crimea

Maria Sonevytsky

Radio Meydan, the first Crimean Tatar-owned and operated radio station, began broadcasting music and news at 102.7 FM in Simferopol, Crimea, in 2005. It advertised itself as the arbiter of the station-coined genre term “Eastern music” (*Vostochnaya muzika*) on the Black Sea peninsula (Kurshutov 2005). Until it set out to “promote Crimean Tatar, Turkish, Arabic, and foreign songs done in an Eastern style,” Crimean radio stations mostly featured post-Soviet Russian (and to a lesser degree, Ukrainian) dance and pop music, in addition to “nostalgia” stations that aired the hits of Soviet *estrada*, the state-sanctioned popular music of the Soviet era (Asan 2005). Radio Meydan also introduced greater linguistic diversity into the Crimean radio fields, with programming in three languages—Crimean Tatar, Ukrainian, and Russian (which was otherwise the dominant language of the Crimean mediasphere). Radio Meydan quickly became a key institution for the indigenous Muslim, Turkic-language Crimean Tatar minority of Crimea, whose legacy had been “ethnically and discursively cleansed” after their mass deportation from the peninsula by Stalinist edict in 1944 (Finnin 2011: 1093).<sup>1</sup> The indigenous radio reterritorialized songs and sounds associated

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1. Finnin describes the specific methods of “discursive cleansing” from Soviet life, as Crimean Tatars were made “subject to a coordinated campaign of censure and slander that erased their ethnonym from the pages of print media and their toponyms from the face of the earth” (1093). Since the term “Tatar” was a generic term for any Muslim subjects of the Russian Empire, the modifier

with the Crimean Tatars, who had begun to repatriate to Crimea in the late 1980s. After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Crimean Tatars became citizens of independent Ukraine, where they grew frustrated by the state's lack of protections of their endangered language and embattled religion while still remaining overwhelmingly allied with the Ukrainian state project because it represented, as one prominent community member told me, "a lesser threat than the Russian aggressor" (pers. comm., May 5, 2008).<sup>2</sup> Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014, tensions between the Crimean Tatars and the dominant pro-Russian Crimean public intensified.<sup>3</sup> The *Mejlis*, the Crimean Tatars' legislature, has been outlawed and indigenous activists and politicians have been imprisoned or exiled. Just six weeks after the tenth anniversary of Radio Meydan was celebrated in Simferopol with a black-tie gala, the indigenous radio station was denied the renewal of a broadcasting license under the new laws of the Russian occupation.<sup>4</sup> April 1, 2015, was Radio Meydan's last day on the Crimean airwaves.

In 2005, when "Eastern music" and the Crimean Tatar language first began to claim time and space on the local airwaves, the radio signified as an instrument of politics. As many scholars have richly described, radio is a technology that fosters new political imaginaries. It can produce the "imagined community" of the

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"Crimean" before Tatar is critical to Crimean Tatars for making their ethnonym specific. Under Soviet rule, they became designated by the nationality of "Tatars." During the period of exile under Soviet rule, in response to censorship regimes that banned direct political utterance, the Crimean Tatars maintained a sense of community through expressive culture, and in particular, through musical performances that sometimes coded political subversive political messages. In the last years of the Soviet Union, Crimean Tatars finally won the "right to return" to Crimea, and approximately 200,000 returned to an overwhelmingly hostile climate. As Uehling (2004) documented, political scientists anticipated ethnic violence to erupt in post-Soviet Crimea, yet large-scale violence was kept at bay in significant part to the Crimean Tatar political leaders' commitment to nonviolent resistance.

2. Discourses of post-Soviet Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar fraternity are rooted in a shared perception of oppression at the hands of Russian, and later Soviet, ruling powers. I benefited from such feelings of shared trauma during my fieldwork in Crimea in 2008–2009, as I—a Ukrainian-American ethnographer whose speech betrayed a competence in Ukrainian before Russian—was repeatedly welcomed into Crimean Tatar social environments as a "sister Ukrainian," a reversal from the hostilities I occasionally encountered among Russian speakers in public, where I was sometimes told to "speak a civilized language" when my Ukrainian speech was detected.

3. According to the State Emergency Service of Ukraine, approximately 20,000 "internally displaced persons" (IDPs) have fled from the Crimean territory since March of 2014, though the UNHCR cautions, "the real figure of IDPs remains unknown and is likely to be higher" (unhcr.org.ua/en/who-we-help/internally-displaced-people, accessed January 11, 2016).

4. Pro-Russian media depicted the non-continuation of the broadcasting license as a "choice" made by the owner of the ATR media company, though the owner publicly denied this in numerous media reports.

nation (Hilmes 2012); historically, it has been used to inculcate colonial subjects into hegemonic ways of being (Larkin 2008; Lovell 2015; Mrázek 2002). Yet as many celebratory accounts of “community radio” have attested, the radio may also mobilize counterpublics as a form of imagined community situated as knowingly subordinate to, and in many cases resistant to, dominant structures (Diatchkova 2008; Fanon 2012).<sup>5</sup> Bessire and Fisher call attention to “the unpredictable relationships between radio technology and hegemonic or imperial formations” (2013: 368). In Crimea, Radio Meydan produced a new and resonant symbolic space occupied by “Eastern music” and mobilized discourses around competing and liminal forms of post-Soviet sovereignty. Were “Eastern” sounds, in the words of Crimeans whom I interviewed, “intrusive,” or did they “validate” the Crimean Tatars’ rightful place within Crimea?

To many Crimean Tatar repatriates, the very presence of Crimean Tatar music and language on the radio was perceived as a consequential coup toward rebuilding their community in post-Soviet Crimea. Broadly, it was conceived as an aural assertion of the Crimean Tatars’ cultural sovereignty within the dominant Russo-Slavic public sphere of Crimea, demonstrating Ochoa Gautier’s assertion that “the public sphere is increasingly mediated by the aural” (2006, 807). Yet “Eastern music”—an invented and capacious genre term with no coherent set of stylistic markers—also activated anxieties among some pro-Russian contingents in Crimea. To some, “Eastern music” suggested that Crimean Tatars sought to align Crimea politically with Turkey and the Middle East and, by extension, move away from the Russian sphere of influence. The presence of the radio on the FM airwaves was perceived by some as an acoustic occupation of Crimean public space.

In the mid-2000s, Radio Meydan became associated especially with urban travel on the semiautonomous public transport system of *marshrutki* (microbuses), which were often driven by Crimean Tatars but depended upon by the majority ethnic Russian and Ukrainian populations of Crimea.<sup>6</sup> (It was also my primary mode of transport around the city during my extended fieldwork in Crimea in

5. I adapt Warner’s (2002) application of the “counterpublic” from queer contexts back into a more classic subaltern context, as it was first articulated by Fraser (1990). Yet I depart from Warner’s abstracted notion of the “public” as a zone purely of texts-in-circulation by asserting the importance of physical public space and face-to-face interaction in mediating contested constructions of “Crimean-ness.”

6. In March of 2015, a Crimean researcher shared (via private Facebook chat) that driving the microbuses was often the only job available to post-Soviet Crimean Tatar repatriates, due to the shadowy nature of the microbus operation. He also verified that Crimean Tatar drivers, who he believed to be the majority, preferred Radio Meydan, whereas the “Russian drivers” preferred to listen to “generic *chanson* [Russian-language urban popular music] on the radio.”

2008–9.) In the cramped space of the *marshrutka*, the amplification of “Eastern music” was perceived by many passengers as violating the norms of the Crimean public sphere, which was overwhelmingly marked as Russo-Slavic. Just as the “sonorous moral acoustics” of taped Quranic sermons in Egypt framed public spaces “discursively but also shape[d them] sensorially,” in Hirschkind’s (2009: 124) account, the presence of “Eastern music” on the Crimean *marshrutka* motivated articulations of post-Soviet political desire through affective responses to musical sound (see also Stokes 1992: 105–8). Thus, Radio Meydan became a focal point through which opposed Crimean publics voiced their solidarity with or anxieties about the indigenous population of the peninsula.

This ethnographic case study of “Eastern music” investigates how sovereignty works in practice by attending to the aural sphere of Crimea, as “Eastern music” is produced and circulated and as it penetrates the public spaces of microtransit. My goal is to demonstrate how this aurally mediated public sphere became politicized in part through the seemingly innocuous background of “Eastern music” during mundane acts of travel. I look at how the radio’s sonic presence motivated Crimean passengers to affiliate with modes of political desire, or what I term “sovereign imaginaries.” I also examine how Crimean Tatars themselves made political claims through “Eastern music” within the fractured public sphere of Crimea before its 2014 annexation. I advance the argument that aural practices—such as the production, circulation, and audition of “Eastern music”—could be instrumentalized to center and even contest the liminal sovereignty of a marginalized group such as the Crimean Tatars. Here, I define liminal sovereignty as a form of political desire that faces in multiple directions at once and forms in the space between these directions.

Throughout this essay, I listen as *marshrutka* passengers, radio personnel, and musicians enunciate political desires through speech around musical sound and through interpretations of musical sounds construed as “Eastern music.” Though my focus is on preannexation Crimea, I track the presence of Crimean Tatar assertions of sovereignty through musical sounds into the postannexation era, when “a new form of post-Soviet liminality” has come to define Crimea’s suspended geopolitical status as a “frozen conflict”—governed by Russia, but still claimed by Ukraine (Dunn and Bobick 2014: 406). As my ethnographic examples will demonstrate, the postannexation liminal sovereignties of Crimea had their precedents in the competing sovereign imaginaries of Crimea that were reflected and produced by Radio Meydan’s aural claims on Crimean public space in 2008–9.

Following Charles Taylor’s (2002: 106) location of the social imaginary “in images, stories . . . legends” and—I propose—sounds, I argue that listening to

“Eastern music” in Crimean public spaces motivated, reflected, and structured social imaginaries around competing conceptions of sovereignty. Importantly for the marginalized Crimean Tatar population, the radio centered indigenous assertions of cultural sovereignty. For the dominant Russo-Slavic public, however, the sounds of “Eastern music” were sometimes perceived as an occupation; as I will demonstrate, such rhetorics of occupation conflated “acoustic occupation” with the imagined threat of future Crimean Tatar insurrection.<sup>7</sup> In preannexation Crimea, when tensions between the indigenous population, the predominantly pro-Russian public, and the weak Ukrainian state simmered below the surface of everyday interactions, such divergent sovereign imaginaries catalyzed by the radio “enable[d], through making sense of, the practices of a society” (ibid.: 91).

What new interpretive domains open when attending to the aural dimension of sovereign imaginaries? Just as ethnomusicologists have long asserted that the political “is not merely an adjunct to the sound but embedded in it” (Meintjes 1990: 38), popular music studies has established a well-worn trope of popular music as embodying desires—be they libidinal (Waksman 2001), identity- and self-fashioning (Frith 1996; Kheshti 2015), or in dynamic tension with late capitalist consumerism and postmodern nostalgia (Feld 2000; Fox 1992). Here, I examine the work that popular music does to express desires for the political—specifically, for ways of life afforded through structures of governance. In pursuing this question, I aim to pivot away from the disciplinary and historical intertwining of music with nationalism toward the question of how music can fit into theories of sovereignty.<sup>8</sup> Beyond its ability to “perform the nation” (Askew 2002), then, how does music reflect and produce hopes for civil society, the rule of law, or how the state delineates whom it protects or excludes? The slippery indexicality of musical sounds permits an ethnographic entrée to examine this linkage: as listeners affix often unpredictable meanings to music in circulation, sounds transmute into codes of sovereign desire.

### **Marshrutka Sounds**

One early morning in 2009, I boarded a *marshrutka* heading to Maryno, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Simferopol, and was greeted by the characteristic sounds of Radio Meydan blaring from the microbus speakers. Maryno is inhabited mostly by Crimean Tatars who, facing housing discrimination upon their

7. Daughtry 2014 assesses how sound “occupies” space.

8. For a historical overview of musical nationalism and its relationship to Herderian ideas of the “folk,” see Bohlman 2010.



**Figure 1** View of the Maryno neighborhood. Photograph by Alison Cartwright.

return to Crimea in the late 1980s, claimed plots of land that had been collectivized under Soviet rule by building temporary four-wall structures, *vremianky*, which they often then built into proper homes (see figs. 1 and 2). By 2008, the streets of Maryno were a patchwork of completed residences, homes under construction, and crumbling *vremianky*. I sat in one of the only open seats in the rear of the *marshrutka*, across the aisle from two middle-aged men with fishing rods, who, I assumed, were heading to the reservoir near Maryno for *rybalka* (fishing). A one-liter plastic bottle of unopened beer sat between them on the seat. The men initiated a conversation with me in Russian, inquiring where I was heading on that beautiful spring day. I told them that I was going to meet a musician in Maryno, to see his home recording studio and hear his latest recordings. *Ugh*, one of the men sighed theatrically, “probably another one of these Crimean Tatar ‘stars’ (*zvyozdy*).”

His friend laughed, pointing upward, indicating the radio’s presence in the *marshrutka*. We were passing by an open field stacked high with *kerpichi*, the yellow bricks that are the raw building material of Crimea. An army-style tent was pitched amid the bricks, and the sky-blue Crimean Tatar flag waved at its entrance. I had visited this site before—it was to become the *sobornaya mechet’* (central mosque) of Crimea. One of my Crimean Tatar interlocutors had told me that the Simferopol city administration had stalled and denied various plans to



**Figure 2** A field of *vremianky* on the outskirts of Simferopol. Photograph by Alison Cartwright.

construct a sizable mosque in downtown Simferopol. The Crimean Tatar community interpreted this as an act of hostility against their Muslim faith, especially since numerous Christian houses of worship were erected within the city's limits.<sup>9</sup> After years of frustrated lobbying, activists seized land on the outskirts of central Simferopol and asked community members to contribute to the building by purchasing bricks. By 2008, there were thousands of yellow bricks stacked high on the field, a fortress of *kerpichi* protecting the men who watched over the site, day and night, from a military-style encampment. One of the *marshrutka* fisherman made an obscene gesture toward the field. Why on earth, one of them asked, would a girl (*devochka*) like me associate with *them*?

The condescending attitude of these fishermen turned increasingly unfriendly as I revealed that I, an American citizen of Ukrainian heritage, was in Crimea expressly for the purpose of studying Crimean Tatar music and media. It was a reaction I encountered widely from passengers on the *marshrutka*, where I often

9. The denial of adequate worship space for Muslims was justified by Crimean politicians at the time through insinuations that Crimean Tatars were untrustworthy citizens, a stereotype linked to Stalinist projects of discrediting them as "enemies of the Soviet people." Resistance to the mosque could also be linked to the contemporary panic over mosques in the Euro-American context where an ostensibly tolerant, secular society bristles against non-Christian forms of worship, especially when they are made publically audible (cf. Weiner 2014).



inadvertently called attention to myself through my Ukrainian-inflected Russian speech, or my unfamiliarity with the *marshrutka* routes that locals seemed to know by heart (passengers on the *marshrutka* usually have to request stops verbally). Since I was a regular *marshrutka* passenger myself, I began to take note of the various conversations into which I was enlisted. Most frequently, the hostile encounters I had—those that often ended with some kind of disparaging comments about the “Eastern” sounds that dominated Simferopol’s public transport—were with middle-aged or elderly passengers. Occasionally, these conversations became so heated that numerous passengers would get involved—some loudly defending me, others shaking their heads at the lack of civility present even in the mundane acts of local travel. Though the radio was rarely the subject that triggered these impromptu, sometimes uncomfortable, exchanges, it frequently became a focus of discussion. As the background music of the *marshrutka* became foregrounded, some listeners no longer heard what had become a conventionalized Simferopol soundscape; instead, they perceived another piece of evidence in their case against what they felt was the encroaching indigenous population.

In my morning exchange with the fisherman, for example, they equated public physical space (the open field taken over with stacked bricks) and the abstracted, virtual, or private space of listening (on the microbus saturated with “Eastern music”) as analogous acts of occupation. In Susan Gal’s (2002: 92) terms, notions of the “public” are in a dynamic, “fractal” relationship to notions of “private,” thus providing “fertile nodes for conflict and debate.” We witness here the recursions that occur when the public/private distinction normalized under socialist ideology is destabilized: public lands are seized by desperate groups to benefit a minority counterpublic, public transport becomes replaced by a more efficient privatized *marshrutka* network beholden to shadowy private dealings, and the sole state-operated radio multiplies into a diverse mediasphere that includes stations such as Radio Meydan—which, itself, aspires to carve out space for a “Crimean publicness” predicated on indigenous Crimean Tatar culture, positioning it in tension to the dominant Russo-Slavic public sphere. In the view of aging Slavic populations nostalgic for a return to the order and stability of Soviet life, Radio Meydan could be interpreted as a form of reverse colonization, reclaiming Crimean public space in the name of Crimean Tatars. To the fishermen, the Crimean Tatar radio was perceived in both threatening and condescending terms; they conflated the post-Soviet history of squatting with the acoustic penetration of “Eastern music” into the public spaces of transit.

Of course, many other modes of engagement with the radio’s presence on the *marshrutka* existed in less extreme forms than the example rendered above, but

those with whom I spoke usually interpreted the radio's "Eastern music" in political terms. One Crimean Tatar teacher told me that though she herself did not enjoy the new generation of Crimean Tatar pop music, her "heart sang" when she entered a *marshrutka* playing Radio Meydan. She, too, experienced the sounds as evidence that the indigenous community was "reclaiming what is ours" (pers. comm., May 10, 2008). Many reported that they "felt they were in a different country" when listening to Radio Meydan; in such accounts, "Eastern music" transported *marshrutka* passengers out of the often harsh realities of daily life in Crimea. Passengers from multiple backgrounds—Crimean Tatar, ethnic Russian, ethnic Ukrainian—testified to this experience. Yet xenophobic reactions such as those of the fishermen were also common, amounting to a belief that Crimean Tatars were overstepping their place in Crimea.<sup>10</sup> Among strangers riding together in public, the radio became an aural battleground of rival sovereign imaginaries.

### Sound and Sovereign Imaginaries in a Liminal Place

Appadurai memorably wrote that the nation and state are locked in "a battle of the imagination" (1990: 14). Through the analytic of the sovereign imaginary, a form of sovereignty-in-practice (Humphrey 2004) which "turn[s] on experiences of self" (Chalfin 2010: 195) in order to project desires for future conditions of governance, this battlefield broadens in scope, beyond the nation or state.<sup>11</sup> While a sovereign imaginary may be concretely territorialized (like the "imagined com-

10. This contested reception of the Crimean Tatar radio also complicates a conventional effect of the radio as a "linguistic unifier," disciplining listeners' ears and educating them in standardized modes of speech and affect (Hilmes 2012: 357, cf. Kunreuther 2014). In Crimea, where the politics of language were hotly contested in daily life, all Crimean radio stations became disputed linguistic sites due to Ukrainian laws that governed the proportion of language used in broadcast. Laws passed by the Ukrainian government following the pro-Ukrainian Orange Revolution of 2004 mandated that 75 percent of all broadcasts must be in the Ukrainian language, and that advertisements on various media platforms must be broadcast in the Ukrainian language in addition to any "minority languages," which include Russian as well as Crimean Tatar (see Bilaniuk 2005; Kulyk 2013). Radio commercials on predominantly Russophone stations frequently accelerated the Ukrainian copy to such comically rapid speed that it was impossible to comprehend. A sonic cue—a guitar riff, a cymbal crash—would often then introduce the "real" commercial, which would proceed in Russian. One commercial I heard on pro-Russian radio stations in Simferopol in 2008 even placed the sound of an explosion at the end of the Ukrainian text, as if to blow up the government-mandated Ukrainian speech to make way for the Russian-language advertisement. Radio Meydan, which sided with the pro-Western Ukrainian government, complied with these Ukrainian language laws without irony.

11. Humphrey (2004) also proposes attention to "localized forms of sovereignty" through a case study of the *marshrut* system (though in her case, it is in the Siberian city of Ulan-Ude, Russia).

munity” of the nation-state), it also permits the object of political desire to be a geopolitical abstraction (e.g., “the West”). Sovereign imaginaries may privilege historical or sentiment-based networks of belonging (diasporas, indigenous communities, or former empires) that can be nested within or located across a modern state’s borders (see Simpson 2014). If, as Humphrey asserts, sovereignty “may be rethought not simply as a set of political capacities but as a formation in society that engages with ways of life that have temporality and their own characteristic aesthetics” (2004: 421), the everyday aural practices of listening to a musicalized urban soundscape can structure how citizens imagine and project themselves into existing, suppressed, or emergent forms of power and political organization.

Crimea, a territory long coveted by regional empires and states endowed with geopolitical import and with ancient Slavic Orthodox and Muslim holy sites, offers an exemplary case study in contested and liminal sovereignty. Take, for example, the twentieth-century history of the Crimean peninsula’s relationship to neighboring state powers: designated an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) in 1921 under Leninist *korenizatsia* (“indigenization”) policy (during which Crimean Tatar expressive culture, in particular, was rapidly modernized through state subsidies), the territory was redesignated as an *oblast’* (province) of the Russian SFSR in 1945, then transferred by Khrushchev to the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian SSR in 1954, and finally returned to the status of “autonomous republic” within the Ukrainian SSR in the last months of Soviet rule. Crimea became an autonomous republic within the post-Soviet Ukrainian state until it was annexed by the Russian Federation in 2014 and became frozen in conflict. During all of these episodes in which political status was transferred between state-like actors, the Crimean Tatars were subordinate to dominant political sovereignties. Meanwhile, the limited sovereignty of the Crimean Tatars could be characterized as perpetually liminal, albeit with different characteristics: in the period of exile after 1944, when Crimean Tatars were dispersed throughout Central Asia and the identity (and ethnonym) of Crimean Tatars was suppressed; in the return to Crimea in the late 1980s and subsequent collapse of the USSR, when they became citizens of independent Ukraine who agitated for indigenous status by appealing to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (Stamatopoulou 2011); and in the period of annexation, when those who did not flee to mainland Ukraine were forced to trade their Ukrainian passports for Russian ones. During my fieldwork in Crimea in 2008–9, I regularly observed two prominent liminal sovereign imaginaries that existed in direct opposition: one associated with Crimean Tatars and the global politics of indigenous rights, the other a neoimpe-

rial nostalgic imaginary tied to the Soviet past and recently stoked by Russian military adventurism (as expressed by the fishermen above).<sup>12</sup>

Crimea, therefore, presents an especially hot-button example of how political sovereignty—that is, the quasi-theological power of the state to discipline its polity and determine “states of exception” to existing juridical norms (Agamben 1998; Schmitt 1985 [1935])—overlaps with notions of cultural sovereignty and the rights of communities (such as indigenous or religious groups) to protect their ways of life (Bernstein 2013: 17). Crimea’s many internal discourses of sovereignty demonstrate how the sovereign imaginaries of a diverse citizenry may cull from different scales and sorts of sovereignty. In preannexation Crimea, for example, a significant constituency of Crimeans believed that the post-Soviet Ukrainian state’s inheritance of the peninsula was illegitimate; therefore, the Russian annexation of 2014 was experienced by these Crimeans as a restoration of proper juridico-political sovereignty to the Russian state. At the same time, politically active Crimean Tatars—whose liminality vis-à-vis state power is inherent in their self-proclaimed status as indigenes with desire for self-determination—were usually affiliated with the post-Soviet Ukrainian state, considering it the lesser of two evils. So, if we accept that the “post” in post-Soviet shares much with the “post” in postcolonial (Moore 2001), then postcolonial Ukrainian Crimea demonstrates the degree to which “the configurations of *de facto* sovereign power, justice, and order . . . [were] partial, competing, and unsettled” (Hansen and Stepputat 2005: 4). These unsettled and liminal sovereignties are, in turn, utilized to different ends by competing sociopolitical formations such as the dominant Russo-Slavic and minority Crimean Tatar populations. Yet all of these formations long for state-like actors (e.g., the Russian Federation, Ukraine, a Crimean Tatar body) to assert the practices of governance, demonstrating how—despite the extensive literature on the erosion of state sovereignty in the present era of globalization—the state form endures as a “screen for political desire” (Aretxaga 2003: 394).

As the indigenous radio made public and audible the counterhegemonic sovereign imaginary embraced by many Crimean Tatars, it also motivated an opposing sovereign imaginary tied to a dominant Russo-Slavic public that could react with hostility to “Eastern” sounds and, by extension, Crimean Tatar claims on

12. These are, of course, only two extreme positions. As shown in the Russian state’s high-profile prosecution and imprisonment of Crimean filmmaker Oleg Sentsov, some ethnic Russian Crimeans also held strong investments in Ukrainian juridico-political sovereignty. Conversely, some Crimean Tatar elites have sided with the Russian government since the annexation.

Crimean place and space. Within the liminal space of Ukrainian Crimea, sovereign imaginaries were prolific, pointing variously towards Russia, Ukraine, the UN, the European Union, the “East,” the “West,” or some combination thereof.

A question remains: what does liminal sovereignty feel like? As I learned from the businessman who founded Radio Meydan,<sup>13</sup> who narrated the radio’s origin story to me in 2015, the radio’s very existence was motivated by an emergent sovereign desire. He wished that Crimean Tatar culture and language be made commensurate with existing Russo-Slavic Crimean media outlets so that people moving through the city could choose to affiliate with the repatriated indigenous community—that is, to literally feel that they had reclaimed their sovereign home.

### **Inventing “Eastern Music”**

In the 1990s, shortly after returning from exile in Central Asia, the businessman was driving around Simferopol with his elderly father when their car’s CD player stopped working. His father asked him to turn on the radio. All of the radio programming—music and news—was in Russian. His father, a man who had spent nearly all of his life longing to return to his childhood homeland, said that he wished to one day turn on the radio and hear Crimean Tatar music, but lamented, “I probably won’t live to see that day.” When AtlantSV, a telecompany, became available for purchase, the son asked the seller whether the company could broadcast in Crimean Tatar if it came under his ownership. The seller told him he could broadcast “in Chinese if [he] wanted to,” so the businessman invested his resources and purchased it. It took two years to clear various bureaucratic hurdles. When the radio finally went live on February 5, 2005, it opened with a broadcast of the Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian national anthems, and then an address from Mustafa Jemilev, the Crimean Tatar human rights crusader and political leader (pers. comm., June 14, 2015).

This story demonstrates, or at least personalizes, how the liminal sovereignty of Crimean Tatars spanned across different generations of Crimean Tatars and instructed them toward a particular politics around music and media. For Crimean Tatars reared under the Soviet regime of “discursive cleansing,” where the very notion of “Crimean Tatar music” was banned, the idea of making Crimean Tatar music public and audible was a poignant statement of resilience (Sonevytsky 2019). To repatriates, even those born in exile, restoring their indigenous claim on the peninsula was an obligation, one strategically pursued through both the

13. At his request, I have kept the original owner’s name confidential in this article.

acquisition of media holdings and through suprastate mechanisms of global governance. These liminal affiliations encompass complex positions: they appeal to past and present sovereignties, to post-Soviet nation-states as well as to bodies of global governance, and, in the realm of music, to the epistemologically pure realm of “folk music” (Ochoa Gautier 2006) as well as to the globally commercialized and cosmopolitan realm of hip-hop. To Crimean Tatar repatriates, the insertion of Radio Meydan’s “Eastern Music” into the mediasphere of Crimea was a powerful assertion of their cultural sovereignty through which they voiced their desire for recognition as political actors.

The radio was never intended, however, exclusively to amplify the political claims of Crimean Tatars. The word “Meydan” means public square or forum, and was the term for the gathering place outside of mosques that were key sites in Crimean Tatar society. “Meydan” also exists, as a Persian-Turkic loan word usually transliterated as “Maidan,” in the Ukrainian language. The original owner of the station told me that he chose the name “Radio Meydan” because he wanted the radio to function as a virtual gathering place for the community of Crimean Tatar repatriates and beyond. In a newspaper article published shortly after its debut, the radio’s first editor-in-chief introduced the station by explaining, “We plan to invite people with opposing views into the studio to debate. After all ‘Meydan’ in translation means a square, a plaza, and means—openness” (Asan 2005).

Yet by the end of its existence in Simferopol in 2015, the Crimean Tatar radio’s name itself had fallen under suspicion because of its lexical connection to the anti-Russian Maidan Revolution. The *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* (Independence Square) in Kyiv was the public square that became a site for two popular Ukrainian revolutions in 2004 and 2013. It was the 2013–14 Maidan Revolution that deposed the corrupt Ukrainian president, empowering the Western reform-minded citizenry and the ethnonationalist right while alienating much of the pro-Russian population. Ultimately, it also made the Ukrainian state vulnerable to Russian encroachments on its sovereign borders, culminating in the “occupation without occupation” of Crimea and ongoing violence in Ukraine’s easternmost regions (Dunn and Bobick 2014). As the conflict between the Russian and Ukrainian states intensified in 2014, this shared word, Meydan/Maidan, was noted by numerous internet commenters dedicated to pro-Russian agitation.<sup>14</sup> For such individuals, this coinciden-

14. The original radio owner also told me that the beginning of “Yushchenko’s Maidan”—the popular protest that became the Orange Revolution—began just months after Radio Meydan came into existence, and was taken as an auspicious sign by Radio Meydan employees (pers. comm., June 14, 2015).

tal lexical connection added a fresh layer onto the historical stereotype of Crimean Tatar untrustworthiness, rooted in the Orientalist suspicions projected onto all Muslim subjects of the former Russian Empire and later inflamed by wartime Soviet propaganda that legitimated the Crimean Tatars' genocidal removal from the peninsula for being "betrayers of the [Soviet] Fatherland" (Fisher 1978: 168).

The radio's marketing as a home for "Eastern music" on the peninsula similarly provoked complex reactions, even among Crimean Tatars. Early radio press materials struggled to position Crimean Tatar music within the new vernacular genre label while making apparent the expansiveness of this "Eastern" identification. As a form of strategic essentialism, collapsing Crimean Tatar music under the capacious umbrella of "Eastern music" provided exoticized appeal to a broad listening public. Simultaneously, however, the term "Eastern music" linked the Crimean Tatar counterpublic to a historic imperial discourse of Pan-Turkism. Thus, the elasticity of the genre term lent itself to multiple interpretations: listeners and producers could assimilate it as a savvy marketing ploy, as part of a neoimperial nostalgic sovereign imaginary (in which "Eastern music" might be either enjoyed or reviled as a token of colonial conquest), or something else.

Through its invention of "Eastern music," Radio Meydan also marked a new era of "sonorous capitalism" in Crimea, in that it stimulated the rapid development of new musical commodities that fueled local imaginaries oriented toward both local and supralocal markets (Moorman 2008: 85).<sup>15</sup> As one radio producer told me, the indigenous radio's existence prompted an explosion of Crimean Tatar youth-oriented musical production and circulation, which, in the mid-2000s, saturated the local Crimean marketplace with aspiring pop and folk musicians. After Radio Meydan began streaming online, it had the potential to reach audiences far beyond Simferopol and its environs. Thus, many fledgling pop stars began to aspire toward international audiences, mobilizing social imaginaries that included new forms of labor, subjectivity, power, and "globally defined fields of possibility" (Appadurai 1990: 5). The shrewd marketing of "Eastern music" activated a sovereign imaginary that touched on a widely held perception of the popularity of "Eastern" music in the global marketplace in the 2000s. From this vantage, "Eastern music" signified a desirable aesthetic cosmopolitanism, one that might open avenues toward European and North American markets, where the "East" was perceived to be "hot." Further, it linked to the emergent discourse of Crimean Tatar indigeneity tied into globalized notions of indigenous modernity.

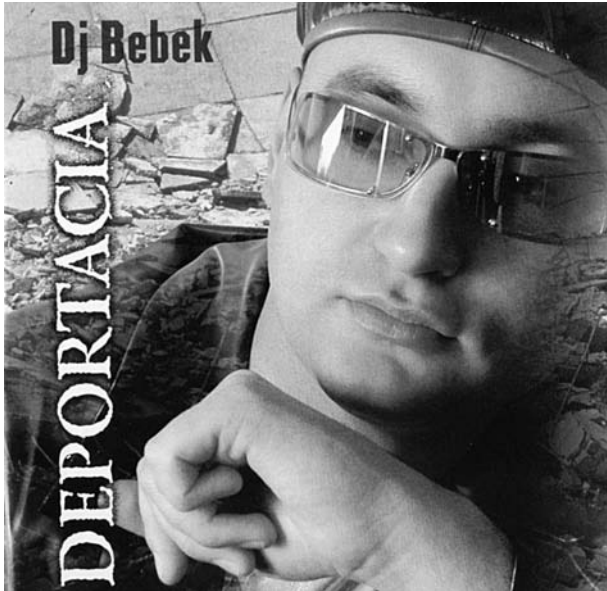
15. Moorman proposes "sonorous capitalism" as an extension of Anderson's "print capitalism."

The conceptual “East” embedded in “Eastern music,” then, was not an inescapable and pernicious stereotype so much as one that exposed a certain truth of the Crimean Tatars’ complex position as the tokenized “exotic” population of Crimea. Despite persistent discrimination against the Crimean Tatar community in Crimea at the level of civic, religious, and land rights, their community had begun to reap some benefits from two recent phenomena that rewarded the cultural difference that is symptomatic of postcolonial exoticism: the expansion of summertime Crimean tourism that emphasized the “oriental” cuisine and luxuries of the peninsula (though the businesses that purveyed these things were often not Crimean Tatar-owned), and the general fetish of “Easternness” that pervaded aspects of daily life when I lived in Simferopol—especially visible with the explosion of classes in belly dancing and yoga that targeted women of all ethnicities and ages, and the growing interest in Indian and New Age spiritualities in post-Soviet Ukraine.<sup>16</sup> The “sonorous capitalism” enabled by the radio’s existence flowed naturally into these broad domestic consumer trends.

Yet for musical innovators invested in reconciling the tension between local Crimean Tatar sounds and those of the abstracted “East,” musical success and political status became articulated together, in solidarity with an indigeno-global liminal sovereign imaginary that aspired for access to international markets while balancing against indigenous concerns. No individual treaded this line as publicly as DJ Bebek, the first Crimean Tatar hip-hop DJ to emerge as the voice of Crimean Tatar youth music. His 2004 debut album, *Deportacia* (“Deportation”) (fig. 3) loosely narrated the Crimean Tatar community’s twentieth-century history from trauma (deportation, exile) to redemption (repatriation, rebuilding). The timing of *Deportacia*’s release just before the opening of Radio Meydan meant that the album was available for broadcast in the early months of the radio’s existence, when there was a dearth of recorded Crimean Tatar material available. DJ Bebek was also hired to write the jingle for Radio Meydan. Thus, he became closely identified with the emergence of “Eastern music” in Crimea. Both DJ Bebek’s album *Deportacia* and his Radio Meydan jingle mashed together traditional melodies and field recordings with hip-hop and electronic dance music sounds and techniques. These experiments in stylistic hybridity place contemporary Crimean Tatar music in the productive tension of being simultaneously indigenous and international, modern and traditional, local yet aspiring to be global.

16. Ukraine, a multi-ethnic nation-state, contains many varieties of internal otherness. Adriana Helbig (2014, 2009) has described how such musical “otherness” has been construed in Ukrainian Roma and African-Ukrainian communities.





**Figure 3** The album cover of DJ Bebek's *Deportacia*.

DJ Bebek's relationship to the emergent Crimean Tatar radio gave audible form to these tensions, most of all through the jingle that became iconic of "Eastern music." The jingle features the sounds of accordion, trumpet, electronic dance beats, and the *daré* and *davul* drums associated with Crimean Tatar (and many other Turkic) traditional musics. The jingle concluded with the station ID: the word "Meydan," sung by a chorus of voices in unison. The tune is squarely in 4/4 time, and therefore not one of the many 7/8 *qaytarma* touted by Crimean Tatars as their unique musical patrimony. When I asked a prominent Crimean Tatar musician his opinion on the jingle, he told me that it sounded like "a new composition in an Eastern style, not dissimilar from the 'Balkan beat' style popular in much of Eastern Europe." It did not sound, he pointed out, "exclusively Crimean Tatar" (pers. comm., March 26, 2011). The full version of the jingle runs over four and a half minutes and was occasionally broadcast on Radio Meydan in its entirety as if it were a typical song. More commonly, however, a brief version of the jingle aired as transitional "bumper" material between blocks of news, music, advertisements, and call-in programs. By 2008, through its ubiquity on public transport, the Radio Meydan jingle had become entrenched as the preeminent sonic marker of "Eastern music" in Simferopol. As Radio Meydan quickly became the preferred radio station for many *marshrutka* drivers in Simferopol, the jingle and the music that it introduced constructed an emergent notion of "Crimean publicness" rooted in the indigenous/global sovereign imaginary.

In postannexation Crimea, where Radio Meydan and its brand of "Eastern music" is no longer available on the FM dial, the acoustic profile of the *marshrutka* has changed. Much Crimean Tatar music has migrated to new, mostly online spaces (this includes Canli Radio, the streaming radio station that started broadcasting from Bakhchysarai, Crimea in 2017). Meanwhile, since 2017, Russian government-backed Radio Vatan Sedası ("Voice of the Motherland") has reimaged "Eastern music" for Crimean listening publics on the FM dial. Notably, this post-annexation radio bolsters Russian state projects to foster affective links between Crimean Tatars and other Tatar communities in the Russian Federation; the newer

pro-Russian radio, accordingly, defines “Eastern music” with this agenda at heart. Meanwhile, since mid-2016, Radio Meydan has been broadcasting from Kyiv, Ukraine, where a large number of internally displaced people (IDPs) have started to rebuild Crimean Tatar institutions of language, culture, and politics. The shift from Simferopol to Kyiv as a cultural capital for independent Crimean Tatar music has been articulated forcefully through music and media in recent years, emphasizing a renewed political solidarity between Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians.

### **An Emergent Postcolonial Sovereign Imaginary?**

In Kyiv, Radio Meydan started to stream its programs online, with programming now limited to the Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar languages. Earlier, ATR television had resumed operations in mainland Ukraine, posting news clips (*roliki*) to YouTube, partly so that Crimea-based populations could also access them through the Internet. When I visited Simferopol in the summer of 2015, I was repeatedly told about how these Internet *roliki* were a small lifeline for the Crimean Tatar community in Crimea who were desperate for media not controlled by the Russian state.

In mainland Ukraine, pro-Ukrainian Crimean Tatar activists have established NGOs (such as CrimeaSOS) to fight the war of Russian “disinformation” and to help manage the crisis of internal displaced persons fleeing Crimea (pers. comm., June 25, 2015). Though some Crimean Tatar politicians and entrepreneurs have sided with Russia since the annexation, the majority of Crimean Tatars remain pro-Ukrainian. In late 2015, Crimean Tatar activists downed the electric pylons that powered the Crimean peninsula, resulting in a multiweek blackout in Simferopol and other locations; this action was intended both to trigger Ukrainian state action on the Crimean crisis and to stage the ongoing solidarity between Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians.

This shared history of Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar oppression under Soviet and Russian rule has given rise to an emergent sovereign imaginary, a postcolonial formation that invests in the imperiled and inadequate Ukrainian state despite its history of post-Soviet failures and ongoing losses against Russian state power. This emergent postcolonial solidarity is premised on registers of liminality: of the Ukrainian state, positioned at the border of the expanded European Union and the expansionist Russian Federation, and Crimean Tatars, split between their goals of indigenous sovereignty and collaboration with the state power that they would prefer to govern Crimea. Predicated on sentiment and idealism, this emergent sovereign imaginary projects a Ukrainian state that is stable and, most fundamentally,

multiethnic. Imagining such an inclusive civic space—one that legitimizes the Sunni Muslim, Turkic-language Crimean Tatars through global indigenous rights discourse within the dominant Ukrainian public sphere—this postcolonial sovereign imaginary runs counter to the troubling Ukrainian ethnonationalism that has gained currency in Ukraine since the Maidan Revolution (Ishchenko 2018). Though it is grounded in fragile optimism, given Ukraine’s systemic ongoing corruption and post-Maidan disappointments, the postcolonial sovereign imaginary is being rehearsed daily through efforts to support Crimean Tatar music, traditional arts, and language in mainland Ukraine through the activities of artist collectives (such as ArtPôle) and community organizations (such as *Krymskij Dim* [Crimean House]).

This emergent postcolonial sovereign imaginary was powerfully articulated through music and media in 2016, when a Crimean Tatar singer named Jamala, who is fluent in R&B and traditional Crimean Tatar styles, was chosen to represent Ukraine and beat long odds to win the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC), a forum at which political dramas are often enacted through overly sentimental or kitschy performances of popular music (Raykoff and Tobin 2007). Jamala represented Ukraine with an original ballad entitled “1944”—the year of the Stalinist Crimean Tatar deportation—with lyrics drawn from a well-known Soviet-era Crimean Tatar protest song called “*Ey, Güzel Qirim!*” (Oh, Beautiful Crimea!). (That song had also been a staple of “Eastern music” on Radio Meydan, and, during her adolescence in Crimea, Jamala’s first public platform was Radio Meydan; in this way, this nascent postcolonial sovereign imaginary also links back to the work of the original Crimean Tatar radio.) The song effectively layers the generational and liminal history of Crimean Tatars, at once using the techniques of oblique political reference that were a survival strategy of Crimean Tatar self-identification during the period of exile while simultaneously linking the specific struggle of Crimean Tatar liminality to the context of cultural genocide against indigenous populations globally. Her song was widely understood and reported as a jab at Russia’s ongoing occupation of Crimea and its abuses of the Crimean Tatar community through suppression of the indigenous media, disappearances and murders of activists, and the stoking of Russian neoimperialism that encourages hostility to the local Muslim “others” (Uehling 2016).<sup>17</sup>

17. Greta Uehling (2016) notes that Jamala’s Eurovision victory accompanies a worsening human rights situation for Crimean Tatars living in Russian-occupied Crimea. Uehling worries that the universalizing discourse that has accompanied the song’s victory as an anthem for “oppressed peoples everywhere” distracts from the Crimean Tatar’s specific struggle.

Jamala's performance further politicized "Eastern music," identifying it with Ukrainian civic belonging. Her victory sparked a furious response from the Russian mediasphere, which condemned the song as violating ESC rules that songs be "apolitical." As the representative of Ukraine at the ESC, singing a song of Crimean Tatar trauma, Jamala's presence on the global stage signified how this emergent postcolonial sovereign imaginary has come to be supported both within the Ukrainian state and by the international Eurovision audiences, who voted the song to victory despite Russian protestations of the song's political overtones.

Meanwhile, since the 2014 annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, the Russian state has poured immense resources into propaganda that frames the annexation of Crimea as a "return" of the peninsula to its (imperial) home. One Crimean Tatar friend told me that her family has stopped going into public on weekends, to avoid the new holidays introduced to celebrate Russia's imperial legacy on the peninsula—a weekly staging of the "gift of empire" (Grant 2009: xv). The Russian state depicts the peninsula variously: as the cradle of Slavic Orthodoxy, as the zone of nostalgic (Soviet) childhood summer vacation, and as symbolic of Russian state power—manifest especially in historical commemorations of Catherine II's conquest over the Crimean Tatar Khanate in 1783 and in celebrations of the Black Sea Fleet based in the monumental Catherinian city of Sevastopol.<sup>18</sup> The Crimean Tatar indigenous radio asserted a claim on space that was untenable in Putin's restored Black Sea "jewel," despite the other favorable gestures that the Russian state has recently made towards the Crimean Tatar minority.<sup>19</sup>

The decade-long rise and fall of the indigenous radio station located in the contested territory of Crimea is not a straightforward example of how indigenous media "emancipates" a population or constructs the imagined community of a nation. Rather, it is a story of how the brief existence of the radio worked to repair and bolster the newly repatriated indigenous community while simultaneously fueling a reaction that reinforced entrenched Russian imperial discourses of Crimea as a dominated zone of exoticism. Through the dissemination of "Eastern music" on the Crimean peninsula, Radio Meydan generated a new virtual space in which the competing liminal sovereign imaginaries of Crimea, situated within the upheavals of Ukrainian instability and Russian aggression, could be produced

18. For numerous perspectives on how Crimea became fetishized as a tourist destination in different centuries, see Gorsuch 2006 and Schönle 2001.

19. In 2017, for example, the Russian government began constructing an official *sobornaya mechet'* in Simferopol. Despite this, many Crimean Tatars remain critical of the ongoing crackdown on Crimean Tatar religious institutions (pers. comm., November 21, 2017).

and negotiated. The competing sovereign imaginaries of Crimea reveal circuits of belonging that thwart existing state logics, instead projecting future modes of belonging based on imperial nostalgia, sentiment, or tenuous optimism.

Much scholarship has complicated conventional views of state sovereignty, instead asking how sovereignty manifests in the diffused networks of the global neoliberal marketplace (Ong 1999), through the indigenous refusal of Western logics of rule (Simpson 2014), through bodily sovereignty predicated on transnational notions of the body rooted in religious practices (Bernstein 2013), in semi-autonomous illegal networks and border zones (Chalfin 2010; Humphrey 2004), or in the decomposing bodies of outdated ideologies (Yurchak 2015). But the analytic of the sovereign imaginary allows the ethnographer to attend to how imaginaries of sovereignty are forged through everyday practice. By listening in—to the interior of the *marshrutka* as the hearing subject responds to musical sounds in circulation, to the hybrid sound palettes harnessed by music producers—we can make out the varied scales of sovereignty that are creatively produced, collectively imagined, and nested in either tension or harmony with existing power structures through the course of daily life. As I have argued, the conditions of liminality that mark the present had precedents in the unsettled sovereignties of preannexation Crimea, and they structured public life through aural practices in spaces such as the *marshrutka*. For Crimean Tatars, the public amplification of the sounds of Radio Meydan's "Eastern music" asserted their cultural sovereignty within the Crimean public sphere. Now, such aural assertions of cultural sovereignty in an international forum such as Eurovision act as a generative refusal—a refusal to consent to the annexation (Simpson 2016). Through musical sounds, then, Crimean Tatars have contested their liminality in order to voice political claims within the shifting terrain of post-Soviet geopolitics.

This article has argued for the consideration of how sovereign imaginaries are produced in daily life through the acts of interpreting musical sounds. As new liminal forms of sovereignty emerge globally through new technologies of warfare, and as greater challenges to the state's coherence are mounted through the large-scale forces of global capitalism and bottom-up demands for indigenous self-determination, scholars stand to enrich studies of statehood by investigating sovereignty-in-practice as it "operates at the lowest extremities of the social body in everyday social practices" (Fraser 1981: 272). An attention to the aural sphere—to the sounds that ears hear as symbolically resonant; to music, media, and the discourse that surrounds it—affords the possibility to hear how sovereignty-in-practice insinuates itself into daily life and feeds the imaginaries the shape future political conditions. Below the surface of frozen conflicts between

state actors, through lived encounters with sounds that signify politically, one may apprehend how desires for norms and yet unknown forms of governance are imagined and reimagined daily.

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