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# What Does it Mean to Be a Kin Majority? Analyzing Romanian Identity in Moldova and Russian Identity in Crimea from Below\*

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*Objective.* This article investigates what kin identification means from a bottom-up perspective in two kin majority cases: Moldova and Crimea. *Methods.* The article is based on ~50 fieldwork interviews conducted in both Moldova and Crimea with everyday social actors (2012–2013). *Results.* Ethnic homogeneity for kin majorities is more fractured than previously considered. Respondents identified more in terms of assemblages of ethnic, cultural, political, linguistic, and territorial identities than in mutually exclusive census categories. *Conclusions.* To understand fully the relations between kin majorities, their kin-state and home-state and the impact of growing kin engagement policies, like dual citizenship, it is necessary to analyze the complexities of the lived experience of kin identification for members of kin majorities and how this relates to kin-state identification and affiliation. Understanding these complexities helps to have a more nuanced understanding of the role of ethnicity in post-Communist societies, in terms of kin-state and intrastate relations.

## Introducing the Kin Majority Problem

In post-Communist states there has been an emergence of new and renewed cross-border ties where kin-states reach out to those they claim as co-ethnic (kin communities). In the 1990s, kin-state relations were considered as increasing the likelihood of conflict, yet kin-states' territorial claims failed to materialize. Instead kin-states moved toward institutional engagement with external kin communities by facilitating their acquisition of citizenship and quasi-citizenship. Despite the proliferation of these policies, little research engages with the kin community by exploring how they identify and the lived experience of kin-state policies. Similarly, there has been a focus only on kin minorities and little consideration of the phenomenon of kin majorities, defined in this article as a community claimed as co-ethnic by a kin-state, which form a majority in the state or substate unit in which they reside.

This article examines and compares two post-Communist/Soviet examples of kin majorities in Moldova and Crimea. This phenomenon of kin-states and kin

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communities/majorities policies is not unique to post-Communist identity politics since there are many examples beyond post-Communist space (e.g., South Korea, India). However, the concentration of these policies in post-Communist Europe and Eurasia, in a zone of intense state-building and nation-building, and across spaces of free (E.U./Schengen zone) and restricted movement (Tóth, 2006; Zaiotti, 2007), makes these comparisons of kin-states and co-ethnic majorities a relevant and important endeavor from a conceptual, empirical, and policy perspective.

Empirically, this is important because existing kin relations research on the cases of Crimea and Moldova is sparse and based on top-down assumptions. For example, Eyal and Smith (1996:223) state that there “can be no doubt” that Moldovans “can only be considered Romanians.” Similarly in Crimea, few studies have researched everyday identity politics in the region in its own right, treating Crimea as an ethnic outlier within Ukraine (Fournier, 2002; Wilson, 2002).

Using “everyday nationalism” and political ethnographic approaches, this article explores the meaning of kin identification in these two kin majority cases, Moldova and Crimea, by exploring from a bottom-up perspective how individuals identify themselves relative to their home-state and kin-state.<sup>1</sup> The article therefore provides a crucial insight that questions these top-down assumptions at a time preceding the heightened geopoliticized nature of post-Soviet space, since Crimea’s annexation by Russia and the ensuing separatist conflict in Donetsk and Luhansk. The article finds that there are many different ways of identifying with the kin-state that blur mutually exclusive census categories, such as Romanian/Moldovan and Russian/Ukrainian boundaries. This article demonstrates that kin majorities are an important phenomenon to research because when viewed from below, they appear far more fractured than their majority status would indicate.

### **From Kin Minorities from Above to Kin Majorities from Below**

External states, such as kin states, have an important role in affecting domestic outcomes such as “group cohesion and political mobilization” because external states can provide key “material, political and moral support” tipping the balance of domestic politics (Gurr, 1993:128). External states are therefore key actors both in civil wars (Gurr, 1993), and in the creation of de facto states, when a “patron” state offers external support in the absence of external legitimacy (Kolstø, 2006:723). What makes kin-state research specific are the bonds of co-ethnicity that kin-states use to claim as basis of their right to engage with kin communities,<sup>2</sup> that is, kin-states toward kin communities irrespective of how kin community actors identify (e.g., Bulgaria toward Macedonia or Romania toward Moldova). These claims have obscured understanding of kin community identification from an actor-centered perspective, leading to homogenized understandings of the kin community as if it uniformly identifies co-ethnically and with kin-state, and have ignored the phenomenon of kin majorities. This article argues that it is necessary to combine approaches to kin-state relations that argue that nationalism is a relational and interactive politics between different actors (Brubaker, 1996) with bottom-up everyday approaches to identification that shift

<sup>1</sup>Fieldwork was conducted in 2012 and 2013 in Crimea and therefore this is predominantly a study of Crimea before Yanukovich left office and pro-Russian groups in Crimea seized power.

<sup>2</sup>This article also makes a conceptual distinction between kin-states that make claims toward kin communities arising from border shift (e.g., Romania toward Moldova, Russia toward Crimea) and the larger field of diaspora states, which make and try to retain claims with co-ethnic communities residing outside of the kin-state following emigration (e.g., Jewish, Chinese, and Indian diasporas).

TABLE 1  
Previous Approaches to Kin-State Relations

	Perspective	Critique
<i>Antagonistic</i> : Originally Brubaker (1996) and developed by Fearon and Laitin (2003), van Houten (1998), Smith (2002), also Caspersen (2008)	Triadic nexus → antagonism between states potential source of conflict	Absence of conflict Does not account for kin-state introduction of policies Top-down institutional approach Kin minority focus
<i>Fuzzy</i> : Fowler (2004), Batt (2002)	Kin-state policies cause fuzzy relations between states in the nexus Not conflictual because states willing to share sovereignty over shared citizenry	Assumes kin-state policies unproblematic Top-down institutional approach Kin minority focus

understandings of relational kin-state politics away from top-down state-level analysis to unpack the agency, and forms of identification, of the kin community, in particular for the phenomenon of kin majorities.

To conceptualize these relational dynamics of nationalism, Brubaker developed a theory of a “triadic configuration” of a kin minority, an “external national homeland” state (kin-state), and a “nationalizing” home-state where the kin minority reside (1996:55). The kin-state, as the “external homeland” of the kin minority, claims an “obligation” to “protect the interests of their” ethno-national kin” residing in other states (Brubaker, 1996:5), while the nationalizing home-state of “newly independent (or newly configured) states” advanced claims and policies “in the name of a ‘core nation’” as the “legitimate ‘owner’ of the state” (Brubaker, 1996:4–5). While recognizing Brubaker’s conceptual contribution for understanding the ebbs and flow of nationalist politics as arising from such relations, rather than seeing nationalism as a given area of contention within politics (Smith and Wilson, 1997), this article makes several critiques of Brubaker’s approach and those who have developed his approach, categorized as *antagonistic* and *fuzzy* (Table 1).

Following Brubaker (1996:111) and his emphasis on the competing and opposing nationalistic claims of “ownership” by the kin-state and home-state over the same set of people, the *antagonistic* approach argues that competing claims between the home-state and kin-state toward the kin community could be a potential cause of conflict (Laitin, 1998, 2001; Fearon, 1998; Saideman and Ayres, 2008; van Houten, 1998; Smith, 2002). The former Soviet Union, in particular, was a key location where these theories were tested with this space imagined as a “cauldron of ethnic conflict” (Figueiredo and Weingast, 1999:262) because it was the site of the “potentially most dangerous” of modern kin-state claims, given Russia’s large diaspora spread across former Soviet territory (Brubaker, 1996:108).

While Fearon (1998:124) framed Russia as having a pathological potential to be the “most likely danger” in the region, he identified that Russia suffered a “commitment problem” that inhibited Russia from actually engaging in conflict to protect its diaspora. Fearon (1998:124) explained that, even in the presence of antagonism, kin-states could be “self-limiting,” constraining the spread of conflict that might otherwise be conceived as able to spread like “wildlife.” Hence van Houten (1998) argued that kin-states were key in tipping the balance from antagonistic claims to conflict-inducing intervention, leaving

conflicts in some triadic relations (e.g., Croatia and Serbia, following Serbian intervention) but not in others (e.g., Estonia and Crimea vis-à-vis Russia).

However, not only has kin-state conflict been rare (Laitin, 2001), but the antagonistic approach reduced kin-state relations to considering only ethnic conflict and irredentism as the goal of kin-state politics (King and Melvin, 2000), rather than the potentially more banal kin-state policies (citizenship, quasi-citizenship) that replaced these irredentist politics of the early post-Soviet/Communist period (until Crimea's annexation in 2014). The second approach focused on these kin-state policies, arguing that the growth of these policies was evidence of a "fuzzy" type of politics (Batt, 2002; Fowler, 2004). According to this fuzzy argument, these overlapping citizenries and shared loyalties across borders are reflected by a general move toward cosmopolitan norms, and of the postnationalization of the nation-state. In this setting, the multiplicity of citizenships and sovereignties is deproblematized and citizenship is no longer delineated legally, ethnically, or politically by the borders of the nation-state.

Both approaches focus on top-down state-level actors and institutions, obscuring the agency of these kin community members who, for example, are the people eligible and applying for dual citizenship from their kin-state. Moreover, if kin-state policies are presumed to be part of a "soft power" approach of co-optation of "people and societies, rather than governments and elites" then it is appropriate to study these people (Tsygankov, 2006:1081) to learn more about the effectiveness of kin-states to "bind" kin communities to kin-states, and away from their home-state, as Roslycky (2011:304) argues Russia did in Crimea.

Second, these *antagonistic* and *fuzzy* approaches have treated kin minorities as analogous to kin majority cases, rather than considering them as separate phenomena. This is not a criticism only of Brubaker but of all those who also did not distinguish between kin minorities and kin majorities (Waterbury, 2011; Laitin, 1998, 2001; Fearon, 1998; Saideman and Ayres, 2008; Smith, 2002), treating kin majorities as if they are kin minorities, which is an unreasonable assumption because of the differential demographic and power status of minorities and majorities in their home-state. For example, it would not be appropriate to consider kin majorities' home-states to also be their "host-state," as in the case of ethnic Russians in Estonia (Pogonyi, Kovács, and Körtvélyesi, 2010:1) and Germans/Koreans in Kazakhstan (Diener, 2006). Kin majorities therefore need to be studied in their own right.

As the top-down *antagonistic* and *fuzzy* approaches do not disaggregate the category of kin majority, this article uses a bottom-up perspective to analyze the meaning of kin identification for members of kin majorities. Caspersen (2008) highlights the importance of exploring the role of kin community elites in mediating conflict and analyzing the relationship between bottom-up conflict and the kin-state. However, she does not consider the fractures that run within kin communities, in particular kin majorities. Everyday nationalism is therefore a useful approach because it allows disaggregation of the kin community from the bottom by engaging with the meanings and experiences of identification.

This article moves now to discuss literature of ethnicity in political science, to show the usefulness of everyday nationalism approaches both to kin-state research and ethnic politics research more generally. Following Chandra (2009), ethnicity in political science is considered as an independent variable, that is, an explanatory tool and a dependent variable, something to be explained; however, these approaches take an overly deductive approach that fails to understand, inductively, the meanings and experiences of ethnicity from agency-centered perspectives (as everyday nationalism and interpretive approaches do). As an independent variable, ethnicity and in particular ethnic diversity, for example, via ethno-linguistic fractionalization indices (ELF), is considered to be a potential cause of

conflict between different groups (Roeder, 2011; Alesina et al., 2003; Posner, 2004; Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Fearon, 2003), the onset of civil war (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004), a tool to be instrumentalized by elites to engage, or not engage, in conflict (Kaufman, 2001; Wilkinson, 2006), in inhibiting democratization and democratic stability (Pop-Eleches, 2007; Wilkinson, 2006; Przeworski, 2000) and inclusion (Horowitz, 1993). While, on a theoretical level, these studies appreciate ethnicity to be a constructed identity, by using census data, they retain measures of ethnicity with an “essentialistic premise” (Laitin and Posner, 2001:17) by assuming that these “given categories” and mutually exclusive categories reflect on-the-ground realities and experiences (Wedeen, 2002:724; Chandra and Wilkinson, 2008:518). As the breadth of census critiques show (Arel, 2002b; see also Uehling, 2004; Dave, 2004; Kertzer and Arel, 2002; Arel, 2002a), censuses are often more illuminating about a state project’s ethnic identification than about how individuals identify (Brubaker, 2011; Goldscheider, 2002). Second, at least in terms of ethnic conflict and ELF indices, they are still unable to provide convincing evidence of the effect of ethnicity as an independent variable of conflict (Chandra and Wilkinson, 2008).

Instead, as Chandra (2009) argues, more research needs to consider how ethnicity is constructed, that is, as something to be explained (dependent variable). However, this has still maintained a deductive approach, leading to functional explanations of ethnicity on the one hand, as providing “uncertainty reduction” (Hale, 2008:9), or as a strategic choice (Laitin, 1998), in line with the dominance of rational choice approaches, or, on the other hand, as a descent-based concept constructed through “myths of common ancestry” (Chandra, 2001, 2006:397; Chandra and Wilkinson, 2008; Weber, 1978; Horowitz, 1985; Smith, 2003), where ethnicity is imagined as a “sticky” identity (i.e., unchangeable) (Chandra 2006). These perspectives fail to unpack, inductively, what ethnicity means from an agency perspective or to analyze ethnicity from the perspective that there might be thicker explanations (Wedeen, 2002), beyond seeing ethnicity as something to be chosen as part of an assimilation strategy (Laitin, 1998). Second, they are concerned largely with relations between ethnic minorities and majorities, such as Chandra (2006) who argues that boundaries between groups are “visible” (i.e., identifiable), when these boundaries between groups can often be blurred and indistinguishable (Kachuyevski and Olesker, 2014). As this article will show, this obscures, too, within-group dynamics that show the contestations existing within majorities over the “content” of these groups and the meanings attached (Abdelal et al., 2006). Political research therefore needs to do more to understand what ethnicity means and “how it [ethnicity] will manifest itself in politics” (Beissinger, 2008:88).

This article argues that the everyday nationalism approach fits well with the need for a more inductive analysis of ethnicity, for both kin-state research and ethnic politics more generally, by refocusing attention on exploring the “lay” categories of “everyday social experience” (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000:4). In turn, this allows researchers to engage with how people “enact (and ignore and deflect) nationhood and nationalism in the varied contexts of their everyday lives” (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008:537; see also Brubaker et al., 2011; Dawson, 2012; Gagnon, 2006; Day and Thompson, 2004; de Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak, 1999; Miller-Idriss, 2009). Moreover, it engages with the complexities of lived experiences of ethnic identification where a fundamental part of Soviet and post-Soviet experience has been of living in ethnically and linguistically diverse families (Pirie, 1996; Gorenburg, 2006).<sup>3</sup> This everyday and people-centered approach therefore has a great

<sup>3</sup>Indeed, Gorenburg (2006) notes that the phenomenon and impact of ethnically mixed families was highly researched in the Soviet Union.

TABLE 2  
The Kin Majority Typology

	Ethnic Majority Polity	Ethnic Kin Majority	Proportion of Kin Majority in Polity (Percent)	Kin-State	Kin-State Policies
Autonomous and sovereign state	Moldova	Romanian	77	Romania	Citizenship
	Macedonia	Macedonian/ Bulgarian	65	Bulgaria	Citizenship
	Kosovo <sup>a</sup>	Kosovar/ Albanian	92	Albania	Citizenship
Autonomous substate but not sovereign state	Crimea <sup>b</sup>	Russian	59–77	Russia	Quasi-citizenship
	Republika Srpska	Serbia	≈96	Serbia	Citizenship
De facto independent, but not de jure	Nagorno-Karabakh	Armenian	95	Armenia	Quasi-citizenship (but citizenship for refugees)

<sup>a</sup>Kosovo functions as a largely autonomous and sovereign state recognized by 103/193 (53 percent) of U.N. member states, including 23/28 (82 percent) E.U. member states.

<sup>b</sup>Crimea is considered in its pre-2014 configuration, that is, as an autonomous republic of Ukraine.

potential for deepening the understanding of kin-state relations by exploring what kin identification means and how it is constructed by actors. So far, these everyday nationalism perspectives have concerned predominantly domestic ethnic politics, that is, within local settings; this article argues that these everyday perspectives provide useful avenues for kin-state research also, by allowing for more engagement with kin community actors and, for this article, kin majority actors who have been overlooked by kin-state research.

### Research Methodology

This article analyzes two kin majority cases: Moldova and Crimea, which are similar in terms of their demographic, historical, and political context and differ in the nature of kin-state policies available.<sup>4</sup> These cases were selected from a wider kin majority typology (Table 2), which primarily focuses on post-Communist and post-Soviet cases as a region of higher border flux (Brubaker and Kim, 2006).<sup>5</sup> From this typology, the cases of Crimea and Moldova were selected as both are domestically complex and potentially unstable (Ciscel, 2010), situated in the internationally “strategically important,” and increasingly competitive, space between the European Union and Russia (Sasse, 2007:1; Korosteleva, 2010), and performing as “objects of keen geopolitical competition” between the E.U.

<sup>4</sup>It should be noted that this is not a perfect “Mill’s method” comparison based on a single difference (see King et al., 1994; George and Bennett, 2005) because the cases also differ in terms of their sovereignty status. However, the level of autonomy is not considered of great importance for this research because of its focus on people rather than state systems.

<sup>5</sup>This is not to suggest that the conclusions from the article do not have significance beyond these cases and the region, as discussed below.

neighborhood<sup>6</sup> and Russian near abroad heightened by events in Ukraine since 2014 (Lukyanov, 2009:57; Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2012; Bordachev et al., 2014). In terms of comparability, these cases experienced similar territorial flux, having been part of their respective kin-states during the 20th century; until 1991 they were part of the Soviet Union, in the post-Soviet context they were subject to territorial claims that had largely subsided (until Crimea's de facto annexation in March 2014).

To operationalize the everyday nationalism approach, I conducted ~50 semi-structured interviews in both cases with everyday actors (2012–2013). Using a conversational style, I guided respondents to discuss their general opinions on local culture and politics before asking them more specifically about how they conceived of, and constructed, their identity.<sup>7</sup> While the article focuses on these interviews, I also conducted participant observation of everyday activities, such as local protests and festivals, and everyday life by living with local people, recorded in daily fieldwork notes, which acted as an informing mechanism for observing the issues I was interested in discussing in interviews.

While everyday nationalism is usually conducted from a purely ethnographic approach of observing ethnicity in situ, this research instead engaged with respondents via semi-structured interviews using a conversational style and an interview guide (Appendix), which acted as a thematic guiding tool without explicit reference to the interview guide during the interview.<sup>8</sup> This everyday nationalism approach was combined with an interpretive ontology, which seeks to gain “experience-near”/emic understandings of identities, institutions, and concepts (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012; Geertz, 1975:29), as opposed to deductive, top-down, or experience-far concepts. Hence the interviews sought to engage with respondents' experiences of ethnicity, alongside other forms of identification, how they gave ethnicity meaning and explained their identification (e.g., by discussing everyday customs/traditions, food practices, language rights), how they positioned themselves vis-à-vis others and framed others, signifying the boundaries they experienced, and hence how they experienced, negotiated, and subverted top-down categories of identification. To this end, respondents were asked both more direct questions about ethnicity than might be usual for an ethnographic everyday approach to nationalism, alongside questions that asked them to situate themselves vis-à-vis their home-state and kin-state, as well as follow-up questions, beyond the interview guide, which tried to uncover their explanations of how and why they described themselves in certain ways. The interviews tried to combine a consistent approach, across respondents and cases, with a richness of explanation, across respondents' diverse experiences, to provide insights into the “signification” and “meaning-making” content of ethnic identification (Wedeen, 2009:80).

When selecting respondents (Table 3), I aimed not for representativeness, as this is not a valid measurement for the rigor of small-*n* research (Small, 2009). Rather, I wanted to engage with a breadth of “multiple perspectives” and “contradictory narratives” by interviewing across the political spectrum (e.g., across the youth wings of political parties)

<sup>6</sup>The states of both the E.U. neighborhood and Russian near abroad: Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan.

<sup>7</sup>Interviews were conducted in the preferred language of the respondent: in Crimea the majority were conducted in Russian; in Moldova the majority were conducted in Romanian and English, with a few conducted wholly or partially in Russian.

<sup>8</sup>This approach differs also from usual everyday nationalism approaches (which focus on meanings and practices) by focusing on the lived experience of kin identification as primarily here kin-state and home-state meanings, whereas kin-state practices are associated with engagement with kin-state policies (citizenship and quasi-citizenship), which form a part of the research not considered in this article.

TABLE 3  
Types of Respondents

	Moldova	Crimea
Young people (18–35 years)	Youth wings of main political parties Student and youth organizations Ordinary students and young people	Youth wings of main political parties Student and youth organizations Ordinary students and young people
>35 years	Members of other organizations Other ordinary citizens	Members of other organizations Other ordinary citizens

as well as with organizations and individually that were not directly politically active (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012:51). A large number of potential respondents were contacted either by phone or e-mail, either by cold calling (i.e., contacting without recommendations based on Internet sources of organizations) or snowballing (using previous respondents’ recommendations), with these potential respondents becoming actual respondents when they responded and interviews were arranged. The research did not begin as a deliberate study of the post-Soviet generation, but in the field these individuals were more accessible (via the Internet) and more approachable from an outsider perspective, and it was easier to build a trustful rapport with my peers (in terms of age), and to maintain contact within and beyond the field (e.g., via e-mail and social media) who were from the younger post-Soviet generation. In terms of identity characteristics, respondents were not chosen based on their ethnicity or citizenship status as this was unknown until I asked them during the interview. Interviews were primarily conducted in the capitals of each case (Chişinău, Simferopol) with control interviews conducted in second cities (Bălţi, Yalta).<sup>9</sup>

The rest of this article analyzes the collected data by engaging with what kin identification means in these cases. To do this, how respondents are identified and their rationale is conceptualized through inductively derived identification categories as a tool for explaining and analyzing these rich context-specific data by codifying respondents’ “emic” descriptions. These categories were derived via a “grounded theory” approach that used open inductive coding to analyze how similarities and differences emerged from data (Corbin and Strauss, 1990), by looking for trends in how respondents identified themselves, situated themselves within the home-state and kin-state, and, most importantly, their rationale for this identification and situation, and grouping respondents according to these trends by devising these “theoretical” inductive categories (Charmaz, 2010:156). These categories did not remain fixed throughout the analysis period, but rather, shifted in an iterative process as data were analyzed for categorization that explained, and maintained, the nuances of the data. Neither did these inductive categories seek to evoke the kind of groupist problems that Brubaker (2004) argues explanations of ethnicity should avoid. Rather, these categories are a tool to conceptualize the complexity and contestations of co-ethnic identification, where mutually exclusive census categories appear blurred and the relationship with the kin-state seems more contingent, demonstrating that it was only a minority of respondents whose co-ethnic identification corresponded to identifying *with* the kin-state.

<sup>9</sup>By control interview, I mean interviews that were conducted in a second site within the same case to test if there were significant differences between the respondents in the main site where interviews were being conducted (Chişinău, Simferopol).

TABLE 4  
Explanation of Identification Categories for Crimean Case

	Place of Birth	Language		Russia	Ukraine	Crimea
		Russian	Ukrainian			
Discriminated Russians	Crimea or Russia	Native and everyday	Lack desire and proficiency	Spiritual motherland	Anti-Ukraine	Russian motherland
Ethnic Russians	Crimea or Russia	Native and everyday	Lack proficiency	Cultural motherland	Neutral	Russian motherland
Crimean	Crimea	Native and everyday	Relatively proficient	Worse than Ukraine	Immature state	Only motherland
Political Ukrainians	Crimea	Native and everyday	Relatively proficient	Anti-Russia	Pro-Ukraine	Integral part of Ukraine
Ethnic Ukrainians	Other Ukrainian regions	Everyday	Native	Viewed as Other and malign	Cultural motherland	Integral part of Ukraine

### Crimea: The Meaning of Kin Identification

Within Ukraine, Crimea is an ethnic outlier as the only region where a majority (58 percent) is identified as ethnically Russian (2001 Ukrainian census).<sup>10</sup> Due to its demography and the threat of separatism in the 1990s, Crimea has been unable to shake off the image of being a hotbed of Russian nationalism and the idea that it could be the “next South Ossetia” (Krushelnycky, 2008; Maigre, 2008; Kuzio, 2014).<sup>11</sup> However, Russian movements failed to gain much ground after 1994 when they were unable to convince more than a small minority to support secession or Russian irredentism (Sasse, 2007). Crimea’s referendum in 2014 in support of unification with Russia might indicate that pro-Russian separatist sentiment remained. However, the findings of this section suggest that strong identification with Russia was a minority sentiment.<sup>12</sup>

To conceptualize the ways that respondents identified as Russian and/or Ukrainian, the respondents are grouped in five inductively derived identification categories (Table 4):

1. *Discriminated Russians* emphasized a strong Russian identification and felt threatened by the Ukrainian state.
2. *Ethnic Russians* also identified primarily as Russian but without feeling discriminated.
3. *Political Ukrainians* identified primarily as citizens of Ukraine, regardless of ethnic identification.
4. *Crimeans* identified primarily regionally and interethnically, identifying as between Ukrainian and Russian.
5. *Ethnic Ukrainians* identified ethnically and linguistically as Ukrainian.

As described above in the section on research methodology, these categories were derived via a “grounded theory” approach, via open coding, to conceptualize the areas of agreement

<sup>10</sup>Other regions have a majority of Russian speakers (Donetsk, Luhansk), like Crimea (77 percent), but Crimea is still the only region where a majority *ethnically* identify as Russian (according to the 2001 census).

<sup>11</sup>This refers to the idea that Crimea is similar to South Ossetia where there was a war between Russia and Georgia over the territory in 2008.

<sup>12</sup>Official results for the March 16, 2014 referendum report that there was 97 percent turnout, of which 83 percent supported joining Russia (see State Council of the Republic of Crimea, 2014); however, the results are refuted and the referendum seen as illegal by the OSCE, European Union, and the United States.

(e.g., Russian identification) and disagreement (discrimination), where disagreements could be conceptualized via different inductive categories along cultural and political dimensions (Table 5).

***Discriminated Russians—“Here it is Impossible to Be Anything Short of Russian”***

**C-19a, C-19b, C-20, C-24, C-25, C-48a, C-48b, C-55.** *Discriminated Russians* identified strongly as ethnically Russian and anti-Ukrainian because they felt discriminated by post-Soviet Ukraine. Many of these respondents were affiliated with local Russian and compatriot organizations based in Simferopol, such as *Russkaia Obschina Kryma* (Russian Community of Crimea, hereafter ROC).

They framed Crimea as a native and historic “Russian cultural enclave” [C-19a, C-48a, C-48b], which was “better” for Russians than elsewhere in Ukraine because outside Crimea, everything “is in Ukrainian language all the time” and there were “no products for the Russian-speaking population” [C-25]. Russia was their homeland from where they had been politically separated and they retained a sense of fraternity with Russians in Russia, and beyond, as Russia was “more than the Russian Federation” because it “exists in the brotherhood” [C-24]. Hence they had a strong Russian ethnic identification that was rooted in their sense of belonging to Crimea and to a transnational Russian fraternity.

*Discriminated Russians* expressed antipathy toward Ukraine’s “forced” policy of Ukrainization (*Ukrainizatsia*) because it aimed to “assimilate Russians” [C-25, C-24]. This created an “infringement of the rights of Russians,” where “priority” was given to Ukrainian language and education [C-24, C-55]. Even Russian-language education was criticized for being “completely Ukrainian” because it is required to teach the “history of collaborators during World War II [. . .] Bandera, Shukhevych” and in kindergarten to teach Ukrainian songs and poems.<sup>13</sup> Katchanovski saw this privileging of Ukrainian in everyday life as particularly unfair and even dangerous for the elderly. For example, prescription instructions were now in Ukrainian and not Russian and this was dangerous because the elderly “cannot understand the technical terms in the Ukrainian language” [C-19a, C-25, C-55].

Though *Discriminated Russians* were not defined by age, they emphasized a critical generational divide in Crimea where the “young generation, almost quite often understand” Ukrainian because of post-Soviet education policies, while for “older people it causes a problem” [C-55]. Ultimately, these respondents resented the newly privileged status of Ukrainian language and culture within state and society, and thereby resisted being within the Ukrainian frame of governance.

They argued that the group threatened by Ukrainization in Crimea was wider than ethnic Russians and wanting, at least superficially, to protect the rights of “Russian speakers” as much as ethnic Russians [C-19a].<sup>14</sup> C-24 saw it as “doubly wrong” that Ukrainian language and culture had a privileged status in Crimea because Crimea was a “multinational” region and so the “vast majority” of other ethnic groups are Russian speakers. However, this concern for other groups was paradoxical given their deep antipathy toward other groups

<sup>13</sup>Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych are extremely controversial figures in independent Ukraine. They are seen as heroes by ardent Ukrainian nationalists, in particular in western Ukraine, and Nazi collaborators by ardent Russian nationalists (see Marples, 2006; Katchanovski, 2014).

<sup>14</sup>This discourse is promoted by the Russian state, which seeks to promote the rights of Russians abroad as part of the compatriot policy, and is found more generally by Fournier (2002) among Russian groups in Ukraine.

TABLE 5  
Conceptualizing Identification Categories for Crimean Case

Discriminated	Defining Dimension	Russia				Ukraine				Crimea			
		Cultural	Ethnic	Political	Linguistic	Cultural	Ethnic	Political	Linguistic	Cultural	Political		
Russians	Identified as victims of Ukrainization	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓
Ethnic Russians	Did not identify as victims of Ukrainization	✓	✓		✓			✓				✓	✓
Crimean	"Between" Ukraine and Russia	✓	✓		✓			✓		✓		✓	✓
Political Ukrainians	Refused to identify ethnically, identified politically with Ukraine				✓							✓	✓
Ethnic Ukrainians	Identified as Ukrainian as a fact of being born outside of Crimea and speaking Ukrainian							✓				✓	

in Crimea and especially Crimean Tatars.<sup>15</sup> C-24 believed that Crimean Tatar nationalism “leaves no room for Russians in Crimea” by framing Crimea as “only the birthplace of Crimean Tatars” and no other group. This was framed not just in symbolic but also material terms, because they felt discriminated in how land was distributed more favorably to Tatars in Crimea than to themselves [C-20].

These respondents disliked Ukraine’s efforts to consolidate the nation-state and consequently they had no sense of political attachment to or identification as a “patriot” of Ukraine [C-48a, C-48b]. C-24 expressed that she did not vote in elections “because they are all against me as a citizen” as “almost all the parties in Ukraine are anti-Russian,” so that they felt as an unwanted “stepchild” within Ukraine. This group therefore demonstrated the strongest identification as Russian and the weakest identification as Ukrainian. They resented Ukraine’s state-building and nation-building efforts, which infringed on their rights to speak and be Russian, and did not respect their rights as the historic and demographically dominant inhabitants of Crimea.

### *Ethnic Russians—“For Me Russian Culture is Everything, Pushkin is Our Everything”*

**C-1, C-3, C-7, C-8, C-9, C-11c, C-14a, C-14b, C-15, C-16, C-21, C-22, 33, C-24, C-46, C-51, C-53, C-57b.** *Ethnic Russians*, identifying primarily as ethnically Russian, saw Russia as their cultural homeland. However, they felt less culturally threatened by the Ukrainian state than *Discriminated Russians* and were more easily able to reconcile being ethnically Russian with residing in Ukraine.

Respondents saw being Russian and Russian culture as “native” [C-14b, C-15, C-34]. They saw Russian identity as inherited from parents where *narod* (people, nation) was “like a family” and even though relatives come from different places, they are “greater Russians” and “pro-Slavic” [C-9, C-52]. Hence there was an organic association with being Russian because, as C-21 explained, “every culture is transmitted through blood and mother’s milk,” where being ethnically Russian was not a choice because “I think in Russian so I am Russian” [C-3, C-22]. Like *Discriminated Russians*, this group saw Crimea as historically “Russian land” and a “Russian enclave” because of the importance of Crimea to Russian writers and to the Russian empire [C-8, C-9, C-14b, C-53].

*Ethnic Russians* had a strong attachment to Crimea, seeing Crimea as a place of Russians who shared both Crimea and Russia as their homeland. They felt an ongoing emotional attachment to Russia because Russia was their “big motherland” and “historical motherland” while Crimea was their “small motherland” [C-3, C-15, C-34, C-53]. However, this was mitigated by less favorable attitudes to Russia as a political entity because Russia did not “understand” Crimea: Putin merely wanted to undermine and disrespect Ukrainian politicians [C-22]. Equally, C-22 explained that Ukraine did not understand that identifying as Russian and speaking Russian was not analogous to being a “patriot of Putin” [C-22].

Instead, several members of this group expressed a sense of patriotism toward Ukraine [C-8, C-22, C-46]. There was a complicated sense of what Russia meant to this group, as somewhere that evoked a cultural but not political attachment because they felt content to remain part of Ukraine, where being Russian did not exclude them from being part of Ukraine. Though C-21 professed a natural sense of Russian identity, he also described how

<sup>15</sup>Crimean Tatars are a Muslim minority group who were deported from Crimea in 1944 by order of Stalin. Many Tatars have returned to Crimea since the end of the Soviet Union, with the proportion growing from 1.9 percent in 1989 to 12.1 in 2001, with 243,400 residing in Crimea by 2001 and the number continuing to grow since (Ukrainian Census 2001).

he had “nothing against Ukraine as a state” because “this is my state.” This group was also more willing to speak Ukrainian than *Discriminated Russians*. Even though they were still native Russian speakers, they did not see language as such an “acute issue” and did not observe a “strangulation of Russian culture” [C-21, C-22]. Instead, disputes over language were “at the political level, the establishment level” because at the “everyday level, there are no differences” as people can speak the language they wish [C-22, C-53].

Though *Ethnic Russians* did not reject being part of Ukraine, they did express some confusion about what it meant to reside in, and be a citizen of, Ukraine. Crimea was seen as an “integral part of Ukraine” [C-51], but this was combined with the idea that Ukraine was a new state that had been created more out of the dissolution of the Soviet Union than by an active process [C-22, C-34]. A young respondent explained that she did not feel Ukrainian or “patriotic” about Ukraine because she did not know about Ukrainian traditions and culture “like they do in west Ukraine” [C-33]. She wanted to be “more patriotic toward Ukraine” and to “know more” about Ukrainian culture and ethnicity because she felt she should as it “will be right . . . we are a country” [C-33].

*Ethnic Russians*, therefore, wanted to fit more into Ukraine, at least politically, not as a “strategic” choice to assimilate (Laitin, 1998), but because of the normative sense that it was appropriate to want to belong to the state in which you reside. Overall, this group indicated a greater acceptance of being governed by Ukraine, even if there was a sense of confusion and uncertainty about fitting the necessary criteria to be considered fully Ukrainian, and a sense that they *should* feel Ukrainian, as this was now where they resided.

### ***Political Ukrainians—“I Feel More Like a Ukrainian Citizen”***

***C-2b, C-11a, C-11b, C-12, C-16, C-18, C-23, C-28, C-29, C-30, C-31, C-32, C-37, C-40, C-47, C-59.*** *Political Ukrainians* identified primarily with Ukraine politically, above identifying as ethnically Russian or Ukrainian. The group was predominantly comprised by young people. This group is the most interesting for Crimea because it contradicts the dominant understanding of Crimea, with many respondents emphasizing their identification as Ukrainian citizens first, questioning descent-based understandings of ethnic identification.

Respondents did not believe that ethnicity or language were important issues in Crimea, or related to quality of life, because in Crimea “citizens live badly, it is independent from ethnicity” [C-23]. There was a strong desire among some of this group not to talk about ethnicity because talking about ethnicity means “we are on a very low level” and “have nothing more to say, unfortunately” [C-23]. As such, they nullified the importance of ethnicity, saying that they want to “feel myself as a citizen, regardless of ethnicity” [C-23, C-47].

This group was not necessarily fluent in Ukrainian, expressing difficulties in the “mixed education” system and switching between Russian to Ukrainian language in education [C-47, C-32, C-2b]. However, they had a greater willingness and expertise in speaking Ukrainian than *Discriminated* and *Ethnic Russian* respondents. Crucially, they thought that in Ukraine the political elite [C-2b] and populace should be able to speak Ukrainian as the state language and should know Ukrainian history [C-12, C-59].

They identified with Ukraine because it was “my home” [C-59]. As C-37 explained, “I am Ukrainian” and “not Russian” because I “was not born in Russia” but in Crimea, which “is Ukraine.” Many of these respondents had been born when Ukraine was an “independent state” [C-31] (i.e., after 1991), which was important because they felt that Crimea was more politically connected to Ukraine than *Discriminated* and *Ethnic Russians*. This group

had little sympathy for ethnic Russians in Crimea who felt discriminated because they did not see how there was discrimination in schools because there were “enough schools in Russian language” [C-18].

Respondents described the contrast between themselves and their parents, who they identified as ethnically Russian [C-11a, C-11b, C-30, C-32]. They explained how they had “partly Russian blood, partly Ukrainian, but mostly Russian” but felt “more Ukrainian” because this was where they were born and they were Ukrainian citizens [C-32, C-59]. This caused disputes between themselves and their parents. For example, C-30’s parents wanted to keep celebrating New Year twice (according to local and Moscow time) while she wanted to celebrate it just once according to Ukrainian time because she was “from Ukraine.” *Political Ukrainians* therefore saw Russia as somewhere foreign and observed how Russians also identified them as foreign because they were from Ukraine [C-28, C-59].

This highlighted the contingency of ethnic identification where ethnicity was not necessarily seen in terms of common descent, but modified by politically experiences. Thus being born and educated in post-Soviet Ukraine disrupted their ethnic identification as Russian. This sense of contingency was heightened by respondents who described how their mobility, such as being educated outside Crimea, was the point at which they “understood” that they liked the “Ukrainian national idea” [C-29, C-30, C-59].

The generational divide was important also because they believed that older residents in Crimea “do not change” [C-37] and are “stuck in the past” [C-59]. Hence this group believed that older people were more likely to identify as Russian and be sympathetic toward the Soviet Union because it was difficult for this generation to “adjust to these new Ukrainian realities, during last 20 years already” [C-18]. In contrast, they believed that, for young people, it was “easier [to] feel themselves Ukrainians” because the majority of their experience was in independent Ukraine [C-18].

Overall, *Political Ukrainians* defended how it was most “correct” and necessary to identify as Ukrainian [C-27], again not as a strategic motivation to assimilate, but because of a normative compulsion. In fact, they believed that Kyiv “needs to do more” to integrate Crimea within Ukraine because even though they lived in Crimea “we’re still in Ukraine” [C-11b, C-23, C-59, C-30].

### ***Crimean—“Well, Crimean, it’s Partly Russian, Ukrainian, Partly”***

***C-2a, C-4, C-36, C-38, C-57a.*** *Crimeans* identified “first” as Crimean because this was where they lived [C-2a]. This compares to the other groups who identified somewhat, but not fully, with Crimea. Their identification as Crimean was largely territorial and interethnic, being between Ukrainian and Russian, blurring top-down mutually exclusive ethnic categories.

Crimean was an interethnic identification, where respondents identified as being both ethnically between Russian and Ukrainian, and geographically between Ukraine and Russia. Respondents felt inhibited from identifying as fully Ukrainian or Russian, and felt partially both because of their equally ethnically mixed parents [C-36]. Identifying as Crimean allowed them to negotiate this complexity because Crimea itself was “partly Russian, Ukrainian partly” [C-36, C-38]. Hence the idea was not just that “we are separate” from Russia and Ukraine because of the geographic and political position of Crimea, but also because “we began belonging to one country (Russia), then to another country (Ukraine)”

[C-57a]. This category reconciled their confusion by identifying as “more Crimean” [C-38], which allowed them to remain connected to the peninsula and to identify as simultaneously but not fully Ukrainian and Russian.

While they felt partly Russian, these respondents were unwilling to identify as fully Russian also because they did not feel close to Russia. Some respondents noted that they had never been to Russia [C-36]. Even within families, there was a sense of the differences between those residing in Russia and those in Crimea. C-57a described how his Russian relatives from “Piter” when they come to Crimea “arrive with such an accent” and are patronizing, and even angry, about the Russian accent in Crimea, describing them as “oh southerners, southerners.”<sup>16</sup> He noted also how “we even eat differently” based on the different ways of eating a common food, *varenniki*.<sup>17</sup>

This group exhibited little negativity to Ukraine, but were also mediated in their identification as Ukrainian and their political affiliation with Ukraine. Like *Political Ukrainians*, they thought that Ukraine was not able to understand Crimea. As C-4 explained, to the rest of Ukraine, Crimea is “like a single town” because they do not understand Crimea’s variety and complexity. Similarly, they felt that Ukraine is more concerned to protect its own unitary character because it is a “young” state that cannot “afford” two official languages due to the “fear that Ukraine would collapse” [C-38].

*Crimeans* showed the greatest sense of belonging to Crimea because of their interethnic situation. This translated to limited identification with Ukraine and Russia, but a greater negativity toward Russia and little resistance to Crimea being part of Ukraine.

### *Ethnic Ukrainians—“By Birth I’m Ukrainian and Ukrainian Speaking”*

**C-6, C-13, C-26, C-27, C-45, C-49.** *Ethnic Ukrainians* are the contrast group in the Crimean case, demonstrating an absence of Russian ethnic and cultural identification and a strong attachment to Ukraine. They identified according to the singular concept that they were from Ukraine, spoke Ukrainian, and were part of Ukrainian culture.

*Ethnic Ukrainians* identified themselves as being Ukrainian “by birth,” were born outside of Crimea, and expressed “love” for Ukraine and Ukrainian culture [C-45, C-26]. They used their “native” Ukrainian language as a marker of being Ukrainian, representing themselves in stark contrast to the Crimean majority. However, they were willing to adapt to the local linguistic context because even though “Ukrainian is the state language,” the “dominant” language of “interethnic communication in Crimea is still Russian” [C-13, C-26, C-45].

Ethnic Russians and Russian speakers, and in particular Russia, were seen as the defining other. These separate spheres were collapsed so that “speaking Russian” was assumed to mean “to feel near to Russia” [C-6], in contrast to *Ethnic Russians* who objected to such an assumption. Russia was constructed as a malign and inferior other where “Ukraine is peaceful in comparison to Russia” and in Ukraine “wealth is more evenly distributed” [C-26].

*Ethnic Ukrainians* discredited the identity of Russians in Ukraine as a false consciousness. They described how Soviet policies had “made [everyone] Russian-speaking” and so “many have become pro-Russian” even though they “they are not identical to the Russians” [C-49]. Russians were seen as ignorant about Russia because “the majority of Crimeans, the majority of young Crimeans, . . . have never been to Russia” and therefore held misguided beliefs

<sup>16</sup>Piter is a common diminutive of St. Petersburg.

<sup>17</sup>The respondent explained how “they take *varenniki* dip in sour cream and eat ... There is no vodka, sour cream, it is okay! It is necessary to douse *varenniki* with sour cream, not dunk!”

about how Russia was “something ideal, beautiful” [C-27]. He tried also to delegitimize Russian movements by explaining how their leaders were not really ethnically Russian [C-27].<sup>18</sup> Russian movements in Crimea were seen as illegitimate and, contrasting with *Discriminated Russians*, suggested that these movements created problems that did not really exist. As C-26 explained, who “would infringe the Russian language and culture in Crimea” because, based on his experience, he had never encountered any anti-Russian “prejudice” [C-26]. Overall, this category was the most negative about Russia, feeling no sense of connection with the state and questioning the basis of links with Russia and the feelings of discrimination felt by some Russians.

Despite identifying ethnically with Ukraine, they supported a political rather than ethnic idea of Ukraine. They did “accept Ukrainian nationalism” and “artificial Ukrainization” because “it will bring nothing but harm” [C-45]. Rather, the respondent saw Ukrainian language as “taking root, as the state language” but this has to be a slow “natural” process, rather than something that is imposed by Kyiv [C-45]. The idea of a “single political nation . . . was not so far away” and would happen in “10–15 years” because of the younger post-Soviet generation who experienced only Ukraine’s period of independence.

While this group tried to vilify Russia and undermine the consciousness of ethnic Russians in Crimea, they were confident in the loyalty of Crimean residents to a political Ukrainian idea and agreed that Crimea was changing its orientation toward Ukraine [C-27]. Although previously Crimean residents had Ukrainian citizenship but did not affiliate with Ukraine, today the “vast majority of Crimean residents, regardless of ethnicity consider themselves citizens of Ukraine” [C-26]. This was because of Crimean’s “adaptability” and realization that “I live here” and this “means that I need to be a citizen” and “to participate in the political life of the country in the elections and so on” [C-26]. Hence *Ethnic Ukrainians* saw Crimea as anchored to Ukraine because Crimea as “a single whole with Ukraine is very important to me” [C-49].

This section on Crimea has shown the complexities of being Russian in Crimea. It has questioned the assumption that Crimea is a region essentially orientated to Russia and that co-ethnic identification is necessarily analogous to kin-state identification. It was only *Discriminated Russians* who indicated a pro-Russia affiliation. Other categories demonstrated either a willingness to reconcile being Russian with residing in Crimea as a part of Ukraine, or the dominance of political affiliation with Ukraine over other forms of identification. The next section will apply the same method to analyze the different ways in which respondents in the Moldovan case identified as being Romanian and/or Moldovan.

### ***Moldova: The Meaning of Kin Identification***

In the second kin majority case, Moldova’s 2004 census indicated a majority identified ethnically as Moldovan (75.8 percent) while a minority identified as Romanian (2.2 percent). However, Romania claims that 78 percent are ethnically Romanian in Moldova by merging these categories (Department for Romanians Abroad). This is evidence of a wider ideological rift between pan-Romanianism and Moldovanism.<sup>19</sup> Moldovanists

<sup>18</sup>The respondent gave the commonly cited example of Sergei Tsekov, head of the Russian Community of Crimea, who is half Bulgarian.

<sup>19</sup>These divisions exist most starkly in political terms and in terms of interpreting historical events, when debating between whether the Soviet Union was occupier (pan-Romanians) or liberator (Moldovanists) and whether the annexation of Bessarabia to interwar Greater Romania was a liberation (pan-Romanians) or an occupation (Moldovanists).

see Moldova as a nation in its own right that is separate linguistically and ethnically from Romania.<sup>20</sup> The pan-Romanian approach claims Moldova as an ancient Romanian region where the Moldovan population forms a constituent part of Romania that was united politically in Greater Romania (Beks and Graur, 2006; King, 1994; Ihrig, 2008). Ethnically and linguistically, pan-Romanians see Moldovan as a synonym of Romanian and Moldovan as a synonym for “Soviet Romanian” (Deletant, 1978:189). In the Moldovan case, therefore, the issue is how respondents identified as Romanian and/or Moldovan and their rationale, with this people-centered bottom-up approach allowing a consideration of what lies between these two opposed positions.

To delve deeper into this question, four inductively derived identification categories exemplify the different meanings of being Romanian and identifying with Romania for the Moldovan case (Table 6):

1. *Organic Romanians* identified only as Romanian and believed that being Moldovan was analogous to being Romanian.
2. *Cultural Romanians* identified as ethnically Romanian but clarified this with stronger, and more political, links to Moldova.
3. *Ambiguous Romanians* identified somewhat as Romanian and somewhat as Moldovan, while defining their language as Romanian.
4. *Moldovans* identified primarily as Moldovan but explained this in terms of being a citizen of Moldova.

Again, these categories were derived by a “grounded theory” approach to conceptualize the areas of agreement (Romanian identification vs. Moldovan identification), and the dimensions of agreement (linguistic, cultural, political) and the dimensions of disagreement (organic, contingent) between respondents that led to deriving different inductive categories to indicate these differences, along political and cultural dimensions (Table 7).

### ***Organic Romanians—“All Moldovans Are Romanians, But Not All Romanians Are Moldovans”***

*M-11, M-16, M-2, M-26a, M-8, M-25a, M-25b, M-28, M-1, M-10, M-14, M-18, M-15, M-49, M-35, M-32, M-42, M-46, M-47, M-53, M-39, M-48.* *Organic Romanians* collapsed the categories of Romanian and Moldovan to claim the majority of residents were both Moldovan and Romanian, contesting the idea there were “visible” differences between these identifications (cf. Chandra, 2006). They stressed the sameness (ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and historical) between Romanians and Moldovans [M-2, M-10, M-25a M-28, M-32, M-35, M-42, M-46, M-39, M-48] to emphasize how they were “Moldovan and therefore Romanian” [M-16]. They saw Moldova as an artificial and Soviet nation and instead imagined themselves as part of the Romanian nation.<sup>21</sup>

Being Moldovan was seen as proof of also being Romanian because “all Moldovans are Romanians, but not all Romanians are Moldovans” [M-25b, M-16, M-28]. As M-2 explained, he felt that he could be Moldovan, Romanian, and Bessarabian simultaneously just as he could be a “brother, lover, and son” simultaneously.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Romanians and

<sup>20</sup>Moldovanism was the official line in the Soviet Union. Today, it is supported by the “neo-Soviet” Communist Party (March 2007), social movements such as the Moldovan Patriots, and a minority of Moldovan academics, such as Vasile Stati, who is famous for the “Moldovan-Romanian dictionary” (see Stati, 2002, 2003).

<sup>21</sup>Here, Moldova means the territory between the Prut and the Nistru rivers, and thereby excluding Transnistria.

<sup>22</sup>Bessarabia (Basarabia) is taken here to be the Romanian way to describe Moldova, differentiating it from the Moldovan region of Romania.

TABLE 6  
Explanation of Identification Categories for Moldovan Case

	Usual Language	Identity	Relationship Between Romanian and Moldovan		Romania	Moldova
			Languages	Nations		
Organic Romanians	RO <sup>a</sup>	Organically RO	Same	Same, artificially separated	Brother state	(Pre) historically RO
Cultural Romanians	RO	Ethnically RO	Same	Some differences	More European brother	More RUS
Ambivalent Romanians	RO	Politically MD <sup>b</sup> Not fully RO	Same, different accent	Some differences	Friend	More Soviet/RUS
Moldovans	RO, RUS <sup>c</sup>	MD/mixed	Same	Different	Positive neighbor	Home

<sup>a</sup>RO = Romanian.

<sup>b</sup>MD = Moldovan.

<sup>c</sup>RUS = Russian.

TABLE 7  
 Conceptualizing Identification Categories for Crimean Case

Defining Dimension	Romania				Moldova			
	Cultural	Ethnic	Political	Linguistic	Cultural	Ethnic	Political	Linguistic
Organic Romanians	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Cultural Romanians	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
Ambivalent Romanians	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Moldovans				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Moldovans shared not just the “same language” but, in familial terms, they shared the “same blood” [M-18] and were “brothers” [M-10, M-14, M-49]. Moldovans and Romanians were therefore imagined to be the same in organic rather than voluntaristic terms (see Zimmer, 2003); as M-11 described, “you don’t have a choice to choose your mother,” emphasizing that identification as Romanian was not optional but obligatory.

Moldova, as a separate nation from Romania, was imagined as an “artificial” idea “created” by Russian and Communist influence, just as Moldovan was also described as not a “true” language because it is really Romanian [M-1, M-8, M-10, M-14, M-18, M-28, M-48]. Being ethnically Moldovan was relegated to a false consciousness where those who identified as just Moldovan did not “understand” that because “they were Moldovan, they were Romanian” [M-11]. Instead, the idea of being Moldovan was relegated to a regional concept based on how Moldova was one of the “țari” (administrative territories) that makes up Romania, along with Wallachia and Transylvania, whereas “identity as a nation, we are Romanian” [M-8, M-25a, M-25b, M-42].

Moldova’s regionality was embedded in a shared historical narrative with Romania, for example, Moldova’s unfair annexation from Greater Romania by the Soviet Union [M-2, M-14]. However it was the *longue durée* perspective that was emphasized, such as their common Dacian heritage and shared heroes of Decebal, Burebista, and Trajan, who were the “parents” of the Romanian “brother” and Moldovan “sister” [M-1, M-35].<sup>23</sup> This “Dacomania” is a common device among Romanian nationalists more generally, with the Dacian period seen to have an “almost messianic ethnic and political role in the creation of the ideal nation state” (Deletant, 1991:1, 76).<sup>24</sup> A further *longue durée* figure was Ștefan cel Mare, who was “our king” and proof that “we have common history” because he built fortresses in present day Romania and is also on “our [Moldovan] money” [M-26a, M-48].<sup>25</sup> Therefore, just as it was correct to identify as Romanian, this version of history was viewed as “right” and “real” in overturning Soviet interpretations of history that had tried to erase this common history [M-16, M-26a].

This group emphasized the deep historical connection between Romania and Moldova, which was embedded in the idea that they did not share simply cultural traits such as the “same language” but were organically intertwined as a region within Romanian because they had the “same blood” as Romanians [M-18]. The separation from Romania politically was blamed on the Soviet Union and the Russian “occupation” more generally, which was blamed also for the artificial cultural separation of Moldova from Romania. This group strongly identified as a kin majority by indicating a shared sense of ethnicity with the kin-state and quashing the notion of the home-state being separated by the kin-state because being Moldovan was seen as a regional identity nested within, and subordinate to, a Romanian ethnic identity.

### ***Cultural Romanians—“We Are Romanian and Live in Moldova”***

***M-4, M-5, M-9, M-12, M-19, M-20, M-23, M-24, M-26b, M-33, M-40, M-44, M-43, M-45, M-51.*** *Cultural Romanians* aligned ethnically with Romania, but combined

<sup>23</sup>Burebista (82–44 B.C.) and Decebal (87–106 A.D.) were leaders of Dacia. Traian (98–117 A.D.) was the emperor of the Roman Empire during the empire’s conquests of Dacia.

<sup>24</sup>“Dacomania” was very popular during the Ceausescu era, with Dacia seen as preeminent for the “ethnogenesis of the Romanians” and the Dacian state, created during the first century B.C., as anticipating the creation of Greater Romania (Deletant, 1991:1, 76).

<sup>25</sup>Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great) was a 15th-century king of Moldova and is claimed as a cultural and historical hero by both Romania and Moldova and by pan-Romanian and Moldovanist approaches.

this with a political belonging to Moldova. They were more certain about their ethnic identification than the *Ambivalent Romanian* category and less vociferously pan-Romanian than *Organic Romanians*.

*Cultural Romanians* agreed that “we are Romanian and live in Moldova.” Hence they identified as Romanian “from an ethnic point of view” but also as “Moldovan citizens” [M-19, M-12, M-44, M-20, M-51]. Like *Organic Romanians*, *Cultural Romanians* believed also that they “obviously share history, language, culture,” such as traditional clothes and dances with Romanians [M-33, M-43, M-24, M-12, M-23], and therefore “belong to Romanian culture” [M-45]. Language, however, was for many respondents the key factor that made them feel Romanian [M-24, M-40, M-44, M-43].

Alongside identifying ethnically as Romanian, they expressed also political and home ties to Moldova [M-12, M-19, M-20, M-4, M-33, M-23, M-51, M-40]. Respondents therefore saw “opportunity” and felt pride in Moldova [M-33, M-24], with one respondent identifying also as a “patriot of Moldova, my country” [M-19]. What is crucial for these respondents is, like *Ethnic Russians* in Crimea, that different ethnic and political identifications were reconcilable and not competing facets of their identity.

Like the *Organic Romanians*, *Cultural Romanians* saw Moldova as a Romanian region [M-9, M-23, M-43] and an “artificial” and “fake” nation and language [M-12, M-20, M-26b]. It was interesting to observe how these respondents discussed their grandparents as Romanian because their grandparents were born, or had lived, in Greater Romania, while they identified their parents as Moldovan because they had lived “most of their lives under Soviet rule” [M-19, M-33, M-20, M-43, M-51, M-26b, M-40]. As discussed for the Crimean case, this highlighted the contingency of political experience for affecting how individuals would identify, demonstrating that descent myths were not “sticky” between generations (Chandra, 2006).

*Cultural Romanians* placed a greater emphasis on the artificiality of Moldovan as a language than of the nation because, as M-20 explained, “if people want to consider themselves as Moldovan it’s a right, because they are citizens of the Republic of Moldova.” Unlike the *Organic Romanians* who saw the Moldovan nation as a false consciousness, this group was unwilling to claim that people in Moldova should identify as Romanian, believing that individuals have the right to self-identify. This group was therefore more voluntaristic and less organic in their self-categorization and categorization of others than *Organic Romanians* because “the most important thing for our society is to build a new citizenship” rather than engage in identity debates [M-20].

While *Cultural Romanians* ethnically identified as Romanian, they used Moldova’s regionality to highlight the differences between those residing in Moldova and other Romanian regions, in contrast to *Organic Romanians*, who highlighted their inherent commonalities. Romania was viewed as “more European” while they were “more Russian,” in terms of mentality, different historical experiences, and contemporary politics [M-12, M-19, M-5]. Moldova was seen as somewhere that was partly, but not fully, Romanian, having “always a mix of Romanian legacy but also Soviet legacy,” where this “mixture of traditions, of habits, of cultural traits” that “makes us different” to Romanians from Romania [M-40, M-45].

Overall, members of this group did not question their ethnic identification with the kin-state, but qualified this, unlike *Organic Romanians*, with their political bond to their home-state. They qualified their ethnic identification as Romanian also by the feeling that they were not the same as Romanians, on the basis that Romanians from Moldova had different political experiences.

***Ambivalent Romanians—“We Entered Modernity Let’s Say, from the Russian Door” [M-27]***

**M-3, M-6, M-17, M-27, M-50.** *Ambivalent Romanians*, were both hesitant, and somewhat critical, of identifying as wholly Romanian. This differentiates them from *Organic* and *Cultural Romanians*, who were resolute in their ethnic identification with the kin-state, but also differentiates them from *Moldovans*, since they did identify somewhat with Romania as a kin-state. In general, *Ambiguous Romanians* were not just ambiguous in their identification but also were unwilling to talk about their identity because of their lack of certainty about how they identified [M-3, M-6, M-17, M-27].

*Ambivalent Romanians* were resolute in describing their language as Romanian [M-3, M-6, M-17, M-27]. As M-3 explained, you can “call it whatever you like” but it’s the “same language” even though in terms of everyday vernacular there were “some russisms” and a “different accent” [M-17, M-27]. However, in terms of ethnic identification, they were hesitant to discuss the issue of identity [M-3] and did not “really feel Romanian or Moldovan” but at the “intersection of nationalities” [M-50, M-27].

Like *Organic* and *Cultural Romanians*, they described Romania as having the “closest culture and history” to Moldova because Moldova had been part of Romanian territory before 1812 and continued to be a Romanian region [M-3, M-17]. However, this historical connection was mediated by more contemporary political experiences. Romania was now more “occidental” than Moldova because Moldova was post-Soviet and pro-Russian, while Romania has an “identity of EU integration” [M-17]. This experience of being different from Romania was expressed also by M-27 who described how:

we entered modernity from different doors. We are the same ethno-culture, basically, and language and so on but we are a little bit different. They imitated the French model. We entered modernity let’s say from the Russian door.

This respondent indicated that he believes those residing in Moldova to be associated with those in Romania, based on common cultural and linguistic characteristics. However, he refuted the way that *Organic Romanians* describe the populations as identical by highlighting the modern political experiences, associated with connections to Russia and the Soviet Union, that are responsible for dividing those in Moldova from those in Romania, like M-17.

Although they felt somewhat close to Romania, their experience of being in Romania as students only heightened their sense that were “kind of Bessarabian, kind of Romanian but not 100 percent Romanian” because “they feel like not being of local origins” [M-27]. Moreover, M-6 described how being Bessarabian had meant that he had been stereotyped as Russian by Romanians while he was a student there in the early 1990s. This was responsible for this respondent’s ambivalence to identify as Romanian even though he had grown up in a household with tradition of Romanian culture, and his father had been involved in the pan-Romanian Popular Front.<sup>26</sup>

*Ambivalent Romanians* agreed in their dislike of ethnic politics and believed instead that Moldova needs a political “civic identity” [M-6]. Romania was seen as a “friend” rather than a “brother,” but respondents disliked also how Romania was “too ideological” in its approach and used a “nationalist ideology” toward Moldova [M-17, M-3, M-6]. In general, therefore, this group was less involved in primordial reasoning, in terms of defining

<sup>26</sup>The Popular Front was an organization created in 1989 campaigning for the removal of Russia as the de facto official language, and recognition of Romanian, and eventually became a movement promoting unification with Romania (King, 1999).

themselves in between Romanian and Moldovan, but did stress more recent historical aspects, in particular the influence of the Soviet Union, which differentiated them from Romanians. Compared to *Organic* and *Cultural Romanians*, they tended to dispute the subordination of Moldova as a regional identification nested within a Romanian ethnic identification, since they saw recent political experiences as a crucial factor that separated them from being fully, and unproblematically, Romanian.

***Moldovans—“I Speak Romanian, I Live in the Republic of Moldova and I am Moldovan” [M-21]***

*M-7a, M-7b, M-7c, M-21, M-34, M-36, M-37, M-38, M-52, M-56.* *Moldovans* identified as primarily and “totally” Moldovan [M-7a, M-38] and saw Romanian and Moldovan as separate but complex categories. These respondents mostly grew up in multilingual households and had multiethnic families, while those in the other categories grew up in predominantly Romanian-speaking families.

For many of these respondents, being Moldovan was something obvious to them where they were “Moldovan of course” because this was the education system they had grown up in and had Moldovan friends [M-37, M-56]. However, being Moldovan was also seen as a “messy,” “complicated,” and “convoluted” identity because there was not something uniquely Moldovan [M-56, M-34, M-37]. Rather, Moldova was formed from the hybridity of having been part of both Russia and Romania, and having both Russian and Romanian culture in Moldova [M-56, M-34, M-37].

In terms of language, the situation was less complicated because all respondents believed that Romanian and Moldovan were the same language, where Moldovan was just the “official name” for the language [M-37, M-36]. The comparison between Romania and Moldova and British and American forms of English was common for these respondents, who explained that “being American” does not “mean speaking American . . . as they still speak English” [M-34, M-56]. Thus speaking Romanian did not impede their identification as Moldovan.

Although they described the language they spoke as Romanian, many *Moldovans* described the multilingual nature of their childhood and home life, although they were generally educated in Romanian-language schools [M-52, M-34, M-7a, M-56]. As they explained, this was because they came from multiethnic families, including their parents, and therefore grew up speaking multiple languages at home, which I witnessed firsthand when interviewing M-7a and her parents [M-7b, M-7c].

While these respondents had a democratic approach to the ethnic identification of others, they voiced the need for an independent Moldova and political identity. M-21 discussed how “in Moldova every citizen must understand the civic aspect” because we are “bound by that ID card of this state” rather than be divided by ethnicity. Several of these respondents expressed a sense of “love” for Moldova and the “people” because “it is my country” [M-38]. Hence even if *Moldovans* were not explicitly anti-Romanian, they were still explicitly pro-Moldovan, believing that Moldova “deserves” an existence separate from Romania [M-21].

These respondents explained also the complexities of Romania’s relationship with Moldova because Romania had to play a “tricky game” regarding Moldova, as the first state that recognized Moldova’s independence and the first state that “does not recognize it (Moldova) to the full extent” based on Romania’s (re)unification claims toward Moldova

[M-21, M-56]. Rather, *Moldovans* wanted a pragmatic relationship, which recognized that Romania was an important “friend for Moldova” but, in a complex international situation, should not be Moldova’s only friend, both within the European Union and post-Soviet space [M-52, M-21].

*Moldovans* differed from the other categories in terms of their interpretation of history and identity, since they indicated no fraternal identification with Romania as a kin-state and instead wanted a friendly, but not exclusive, relationship with Romania. They described a sense of shared language with Romania, but no cultural or ethnic identification as Romanian.

## Conclusion

Unlike previous kin-state research, this article has tried to focus on unpacking the complexities of kin identification in two kin majority cases using the everyday nationalism approach. In both cases, disaggregating the kin majority showed how respondents rarely conceived of themselves in singular terms, but in terms of different assemblages (cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and political) of Russian/Ukrainian or Romanian/Moldovan forms of identification, demonstrating the elements of contestation over the meaning of kin identification (see also Abdelal et al., 2006). In Moldova, respondents indicated not just many ways of being Romanian and Moldovan, but different interpretations about the relationship between these categories. Moreover, the majority of respondents indicated a move away from Soviet Moldovanist perspectives toward a perspective that blurs the boundaries, at least culturally, between being Romanian and Moldovan, and orientates Moldova at an everyday level increasingly toward Romania, as the kin-state. This is heightened by the post-Soviet generation who has strengthened its sense of commonalities with Romania in a way that was not possible for their parents who grew up under the Soviet system. This emphasizes the contingency of identity, relative to political experiences, rather than the continuation of identity meanings and experiences between generations, even of the same family.

In Crimea, at the everyday level, respondents indicated a move away from the kin-state based on their post-Soviet experience. In the context of contemporary events in Crimea, this article demonstrates that the nature and strength of Russian identification is often overplayed and underanalyzed. Many respondents, especially those of the post-Soviet generation, questioned their Russian identification and/or reconciled it with a political affiliation to Ukraine because the majority of their experience had been as a citizen of Ukraine. This finding is politically relevant for demonstrating that the kin majority did not behave as a unitary actor, but instead there was a schism between those who problematized being Russian abroad (*Discriminated Russians*), those who did not (*Ethnic Russians*), and those who refused to identify as ethnically Russian (*Political Ukrainians*). Rather, what was key was the sense of discrimination these individuals felt, suggesting that the salience of identity for ethnic Russian communities elsewhere (e.g., in Latvia and Estonia) may be an important future avenue for research, in particular given the geopolitical tensions arising from the 2014 Ukrainian crisis and the increasing restrictions on ethnic Russians in these states (citizenship, linguistic rights, language inspectorates), as well as for other kin and diaspora communities when members of these communities may feel at risk of, or want to politicize, feelings of home-state discrimination (e.g., relations between the Jewish diaspora and Israel).

This bottom-up approach to kin identification in Crimea and Moldova challenges research based on mutually exclusive and deductive census and survey categories by showing the complexities and contestations surrounding co-ethnic identification. This finding, while generated from a specific context, has more generalizable relevance by confirming findings from the literature that explains how it is necessary both to go beyond census categories and data (Arel, 2002a, 2002b; Dave, 2004; Kertzer and Arel, 2002; Uehling, 2004; Burton, Nandi, and Platt, 2010) to challenge research that offers an overly thin conceptualization of ethnicity in favor of thicker meaning-focused accounts, but also to understand, in a more situated everyday setting, how ethnicity works from the bottom up. This meaning-focused perspective showed, for example, that individuals (e.g., *Political Ukrainians*) did not strategically seek assimilation (cf., Laitin, 1998) but rather offered a normative justification for wanting to match their belonging to the only state they had experience of and subvert the ethnic categories imposed on them by the local political and familial spheres.

This article has shown that it is necessary to work further with these “categories of practice” (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000:4) and experience-near/emic concepts (Geertz, 1975; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012) to question the assumption that ethnicity operates as a “myth of common descent,” which pervades nationalism studies and political science (Chandra, 2001, 2006:397; Chandra and Wilkinson, 2008; Weber, 1978; Horowitz, 1985; Smith, 2003). Rather, this article has shown the contingency of ethnicity where this myth of descent can be disrupted and distorted by political experiences and contexts, such as the dissolution of a federal state.

Second, when viewed from below, the notion of a kin majority as an ethnically homogenous majority is much more complex than the “cohesive” communities that political science had assumed (King and Melvin, 2000:110). As such, it should not be assumed that kin communities are unitary actors; rather, as this meaning-centered research has shown, individuals demonstrated different cross-cutting ties, across and between state-level actors. In the two cases there were key aspects of identification that were associated both with strong co-ethnic identification (in terms of salience) and identification with the kin-state, and greater demands for kin-state interaction that had not been teased out by the confrontational and fuzzy top-down approaches. This demonstrates the need to consider not only ingroup/outgroup dynamics across minority/majority dyads but also to consider within-group dynamics, based on the complexities discussed here, both with regards to kin-state research and identity/ethnic politics research more widely, in particular where there are contested meanings concerning who these majorities are, and competing kin-state/home-state claims over these majorities (e.g., Macedonia/Bulgaria, Albania/Kosovo), where further research could disentangle these dynamics that mean some, but not all, within the kin majority or kin community consider the kin-state to be their homeland, and seek interaction with this kin-state. As Hoe (2005) discusses, these dynamics could hold for unpacking within-group dynamics for diaspora communities, such as the contested experiences of Chinese identification for (nominally) Chinese communities in Malaysia and Singapore. Overall, this article demonstrates the need for further agency-centered engagement with the phenomenon of kin majorities, as well as kin minority and diaspora communities more generally, to unpack the varying meanings and experiences of identification, and their varying interactions with the kin-state and home-state, in contributing to further understanding of ethnic politics within these kin-state nexuses.

**Appendix: Interview Guide**

Theme	Questions
Basic introduction questions	What do you do in [fieldwork site]? What does your organization do? Where were you born? What about your parents/family?
Culture and politics	What do you think about politics in [fieldwork site]? What do you think about culture in [fieldwork site]?
Self-identification	For ethnicity, how do you feel yourself? What makes you feel [ethnicity]? What about language? Culture? Do you think that there are differences between [different groups] in [case]? Do you feel near or far to [kin-state]? How do you feel in [kin-state]?
Kin-state relations	What do you think about relations between [kin-state] and [fieldwork site]?

NOTES: Fieldwork site = Moldova or Crimea; kin-state = Romania (for Moldovan case) or Russia (for Crimean case).

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