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THE COSSACK REVIVAL AND THE MEMORIALIZATION OF THE CIVIL WAR**Aleksandr A. Kamentsev**

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Abstract. *Introduction.* This article examines how the Cossack revival movement activists conducted memory politics regarding the Russian Civil War by cooperating with, and sometimes opposing, local authorities in the Rostov and Krasnodar regions in the 1990–2010s. *Methods and materials.* The research uses the institutional approach to analyze memory policy as an interaction of multiple actors arguing for symbolic capital and political domination. It draws on a wide range of source material, some of which is analyzed for the first time in historiography. *Analysis.* In the early stages of the revival, the key theme for Cossack memorial activism was the Civil War and, as a consequence, the Soviet repressive policy of de-Cossackization, which activists conceptualized as genocide of the Cossacks in order to obtain preferences from the authorities. It was in the “Cossack” territories that the memorialization of the White heroes of the Civil War began in the form of monuments and museum exhibitions. The article argues that the demonstration of reconciliation and harmony in the form of the installation of monuments of the same name in Krasnodar and Novocherkassk was a political move by local Cossack elites seeking to legitimize their position in the power vertical. *Results.* The victim narrative about the genocide during the Civil War was a consensus for the entire Cossack movement until the mid-2000s, when the process of bureaucratization took shape. After that the narrative of de-Cossackization began to be used to emphasize the heroic nature of the Cossacks, who overcame suffering and once again took their place as defenders of Russia. The agonistic approach to the memory policy has changed to an antagonistic one. *Funding.* This article was supported by the Russian Science Foundation grant №25-28-20369 “The policy of memory regarding the participation of the Don Cossacks in the Civil War 1918–1920 year in Southern Russia in the Soviet and post-Soviet period: images of the Cossacks, memorial space, forms of commemoration” and the Administration of the Volgograd Region.

Key words: Cossack revival, collective memory, memory politics, genocide of the Cossacks, Civil War, history and modernity.

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**ВОЗРОЖДЕНИЕ КАЗАЧЕСТВА И МЕМОРИАЛИЗАЦИЯ
ГРАЖДАНСКОЙ ВОЙНЫ****Александр Андреевич Каменцев**

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Аннотация. *Введение.* В данной статье рассматривается, как активисты движения за возрождение казачества проводили мемориальную политику в отношении Гражданской войны в России, сотрудничая, а порой и противостоя местным властям в Ростовской области и Краснодарском крае в 1990–2010-х годах. *Методы и материалы.* В исследовании используется институциональный подход для анализа политики памяти как взаимодействия множества акторов, борющихся за символический капитал и политическое доминирование. Статья написана на основе архивного и полевого источникового материала, часть из которого впервые анализируется в историографии. *Анализ.* На раннем этапе возрождения ключевой темой для мемориального

активизма казаков была Гражданская война и, как ее следствие, советская репрессивная политика расказачивания, которую активисты концептуализировали как геноцид казаков для получения преференций от властей. Именно на «казачьих» территориях была начата мемориализация белых героев Гражданской войны посредством памятников и музейных экспозиций. В статье утверждается, что демонстрация примирения и согласия в виде установки одноименных памятников в Краснодаре и Новочеркасске являлась воплощением политических инициатив местных казачьих элит, стремившихся легитимировать свое положение в вертикали власти. *Результаты.* Виктимный нарратив о геноциде времен Гражданской войны был консенсусным для всего казачьего движения до середины 2000-х гг., когда оформился процесс бюрократизации. После этого обращаться к нарративу о расказачивании стали для того, чтобы подчеркнуть героическую природу казачества, которое преодолело страдания и снова заняло место защитников России. Агонистский подход в политике памяти сменился антагонистским. *Финансирование.* Статья выполнена при поддержке РНФ грант № 25-28-20369 «Политика памяти в отношении участия донского казачества в гражданской войне 1918–1920 гг. на юге России в советский и постсоветский период: образы казачества, мемориальное пространство, формы коммеморации» и Администрации Волгоградской области.

Ключевые слова: возрождение казачества, коллективная память, политика памяти, геноцид казаков, Гражданская война, современная история.

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Introduction. A comprehensive historiography on the issue of Cossack memory politics in the post-Soviet period, including the memorialization of the Civil War in Southern Russia, has not yet been developed. Individual research works are either overviews [17; 28; 38] or fragmentary, devoted to the local memorials themselves [10]. In this article, using specific cases based on unpublished sources, I develop the idea of red-white memory and the political use of victim narrative, as expressed in my Russian-language article [14]. This article does not aim to describe all the memorial events of this period but focuses on key cases that allow us to trace the transformation of interactions and conflicts between the main actors in memory politics: Cossack activists and local authorities. The territorial boundaries of the study are the Rostov and Krasnodar regions, which set the trends in the revival of the Cossacks and the memorialization of the Civil War.

Methods and materials. The scholars, who write about the third wave in memory studies, suggest that the process of memory production should be seen as part of the process of identity production and group formation and as an interaction of multiple actors [7]. The attention should be on actors and institutions, seen both as organizations and as sustainable practices, and their interaction in broadly understood processes of commemoration (for adaptation of this approach to Russian material see: [27]). I share this approach when I focus on conflicts of

narratives, struggles over museums, monuments, and so on.

Memory politics is a part of broader symbolic politics which takes place on national, international, regional and local levels. It, on the one hand, reflects existing relations of power and dominance and, on the other hand, influences their dynamics [23]. The mnemonic configuration in a particular political arena (national, local, international) creates opportunities and constraints for political actors using the past. The dominance of some versions of memory and the marginalization of others should be seen as a dynamic result of symbolic struggle [1; 23]. I consider a case of contemporary Cossack memory politics as the transition from an agonistic approach, based on a dialogue of competing narratives [3; 29], to an antagonistic one. The last one leads to a situation where there could be only one hegemonic narrative [32].

The first group of sources includes the “Cossack” laws, the statutes of the Cossack societies, and the correspondence of the Cossack leaders both among themselves and with the state authorities, based on archival and published documents.

To analyze the media representations of the memory politics, I use the printed periodicals for the 1990s – 2000s and the Cossack websites for the 2010s. The discourse analysis [18] is my basic instrument for this research.

I have examined exhibitions in state regional museums dealing with Cossack history, as well

as the private museum, analyzing both the internal logic of the museum, its *Eigensinn* [21], and the heterogeneity of visitor perception [22].

Monuments serve as a field of competition for political actors and private interest groups to gain symbolic capital, defining official heroes and historical incidents that frame state or group identities [8]. I have found out actors interested in erecting main Cossack Civil War monuments or those who competed with them. Memorial conflicts often unfolded around these installations, highlighting different interests and interactions. I use metaphors of the memorial landscape as text, arena, and performance [6].

Finally, in-depth semi-structured interviews with leaders of the revival movement and Cossack activists shed light on topics not reflected in written sources.

Analysis. *Institutionalization of the Cossack Memory.* In 1991, the Cossacks were included in the list of the USSR's repressed peoples which must be rehabilitated. It was a result of the Cossack revival movement's lobby. From the viewpoint of first-generation "Cossack revival" activists, this concept was very suitable for the tasks of the movement, as it puts the Cossacks among the peoples and nations that were regaining their identity.

From the beginning, activists legitimized their status through symbolic politics on "Cossack territory" divided into the Rostov, Volgograd, Krasnodar, and Stavropol regions. They initiated the restoration of pre-revolutionary place names, the installation of memorials, commemorative events, and historical reenactments. Since the late 1980s, new local history museums devoted to Cossack history opened in stanitsas. The central theme was the Civil War and the subsequent Soviet repressive policy of de-Cossackization, which activists conceptualized as genocide.

The statutes of all revivalist organizations in the early 1990s contained the following clause: promoting the restoration of historical names and the removal of monuments dedicated to individuals involved in repressing Cossacks and preserving Cossack monuments [4]. In addition, it was stated that two of the main goals of the revival was restoring the historical truth about the Cossacks and their role in the creation of Russia and conducting a public trial of the ideologists of the de-Cossackization [5]. Thus, the heroic and victim

narratives constantly went hand in hand, complementing each other, and were instrumentalized depending on political goals. How did revival activists influence the symbolic landscape of southern Russia?

Since early 1991, the Krasnodar administration has been receiving requests from Cossacks to rename Sverdlov Street, arguing that in January 1919 he signed a directive of the Organizing Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and was the initiator of the Cossack genocide [19]. At a rally on January 26, 1991, on the occasion of the 72nd anniversary of the signing of the "Circular Letter", the Kuban Cossack organization demanded that monuments to Sverdlov be dismantled throughout the region and that streets named after Sverdlov and Ordzhonikidze be given back their historical names [36]. With the assistance of the Krasnodar Toponymic Commission, in 1993, Sverdlov Street was given back its historical name, Karasunskaya, and Sverdlov Square was renamed Druzhby Square. However, a more ambitious renaming of Krasnodar to Yekaterinodar was rejected in a 1993 referendum – with only 22% in favor [37]. The commemorative practices of the Cossacks, dedicated to the anti-Bolshevik movement of the Civil War, did not always find understanding among the city administration.

In 1992, with funds raised by the Kuban Cossack Union of the United States, a memorial was erected near Krasnodar to commemorate the soldiers who died during the First Ice Campaign under the command of General Kornilov [30]. The monument bears the inscription: "General Lavr Georgievich Kornilov died here on March 31, 1918." However, this site is located 10 kilometers from where Kornilov actually died. According to activists, the authorities deliberately chose a location for the monument that is far from the city and the highway. This demonstrates the peripheral place of the Civil War and the heroes of the White movement in the official memorial landscape.

Nevertheless, Kuban residents held annual parades on Krasnodar's main street and square to mark the adoption of the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples, commemorating the Cossacks who were victims of the Soviet regime since the Civil War. In addition, in memory of the

White Cossacks shot in 1918–1920, commemorations have been held annually since the early 1990s in various Kuban villages, where representatives of the entire Kuban Cossack Host gather in traditional uniform. A memorial cross has been erected in each of these villages. Also, since 1995, Kornilov commemorations have been held in Krasnodar on April 13 at the site of the general's death.

In 1995, thanks to the persistent initiative of Ataman Vladimir Gromov and his leading Cossack organization, the law "On the Symbols of the Krasnodar Region" was adopted. The 1919 Kuban People's Republic flag (blue-crimson-green), the coat of arms, and the Cossack anthem "You, Kuban, You Are Our Motherland" were adopted as regional symbols. A similar symbolic politics was held in the neighboring Rostov region. In 1996, the local authorities adopted the blue-yellow-red flag, the coat of arms with ataman's symbols and the anthem "The Orthodox Quiet Don was stirred and agitated" of the Civil War Cossack Don Republic as regional symbols. However, this was an initiative of the Rostov political elite, which led the main part of the Cossack movement, adopting their symbols to strengthen their own legitimacy [24]. However, the general population largely identifies these symbols with the Cossack lands rather than the specific Civil War republics.

On the one hand, memory of the Civil War was important to the politicized segment of Russian society in the 1990s, as the Soviet narrative was being completely reevaluated and the "white" idea, which took the form of nostalgia for "the Russia we lost", was once again becoming attractive. However, authorities were wary of initiatives to hold commemorative practices and create memorials dedicated to the Civil War due to the lack of public consensus [39, p. 352]. Thus, the Cossack movement, which had not yet been fully under state control, entered into a memorial conflict with the authorities, as the memory of the Civil War was directly linked to the then-current ideas of Cossack autonomy and the narrative of de-Cossackization.

Reconciliation and Harmony. The monument "To the Cossacks of the Quiet Don" was erected on a specially constructed mound by the road to the village of Veshenskaya in May 1994 in honor of the 89th anniversary of Mikhail

Sholokhov's birth. The sculptural composition depicts a collective image of a Cossack on horseback. It is popularly known as the monument of Grigory Melekhov. The Cossack is dressed in a greatcoat with a rifle on his back and a uniform cap on his head, reminiscent of the imperial army and the White movement. However, the first version of the monument, the concept of which was developed by sculptor N.V. Mozhaev back in 1956 for the upcoming exhibition marking the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution, assumed that the horseman would be wearing a Red Army Budenovka hat and have a youthful face. It was in this form that a bronze model of the sculpture entitled "The Eaglet" (Orlyonok) was cast and displayed at various exhibitions, while a plaster version was presented by the author to Mikhail Sholokhov in 1982 and is kept in his house museum in Veshenskaya [31].

Museum staff say that the first secretary of the Rostov Regional Committee (1966–1984), Ivan Bondarenko, while visiting Sholokhov, saw the model and suggested installing the monument at the entrance to Rostov-on-Don. The idea was revisited several years later, when the process of the Cossacks' revival began. During discussions with representatives of the Rostov administration about the creation of a full-size monument in 1990–1991, Cossack activists categorically protested against the figure of the horseman wearing a Budenovka hat, threatening to cut off his head [40].

Thus, the headdress played a key role in the symbolic meaning of the entire monument. In the original version the author conceived the monument, judging by its name, as a tribute to young revolutionary red cavalymen in general rather than specifically to the Cossacks. However, during the campaign for the Red Cossacks in the late 1980s, the Rostov regional authorities wanted to use the monument to commemorate the "right" (red) Cossacks. Revival activists, among whom there was an anti-communist consensus, insisted on replacing the Budenovka hat with a traditional cap with a visible Cossack forelock and a trademark moustache. The young Red Army soldier was transformed into a stern Don Cossack.

1997, the 80th anniversary of the revolution, was declared the Year of Reconciliation by President Yeltsin. In Krasnodar, a monument to Reconciliation and Harmony was laid and opened

in 1998, with a Red Army *budenovka* hat and a Cossack *papakha* hat lying side by side as its central composition. They are surrounded by a golden ring with the inscription “To the victims of the Civil War in Yekaterinodar”. That same year, Krasnodar’s mayor, Valeriy Samoylenko, warned Ataman Gromov against holding a mass event for General Kornilov, stating it would divide the population [20].

In this way, the local authorities attempted to make a conciliatory narrative dominant, without supporting the Cossacks’ proposals to commemorate anti-Bolshevik historical figures. At the same time, activists continued the tradition of holding commemorations in various Kuban villages for Cossacks killed by the Bolsheviks. These events attracted up to several thousand participants, including representatives of local administrations.

The first full-fledged monument to a White Civil War hero was erected in the Rostov region in 2003. Although it was not a monument to a Cossack but to General Sergei Markov, it was erected with the support of the leading Cossack organization Don Cossack Host. The main initiator of the monument was Moscow entrepreneur Alexander Alekaev, head of the patriotic project “White Warriors”. The Markov monument was originally planned to be erected in Rostov-on-Don. However, following a meeting of the city’s interdepartmental toponymic commission and the Ministry of Culture of the Rostov Region, it was decided to erect the monument in the city of Salsk, where Markov died in 1918. The initiative was supported by General Gennadiy Troshev, advisor to the president of Russia on Cossack issues, a number of high-ranking military and diplomatic officials, the governor of the Rostov Region, Vasiliy Chub, and his deputy, Ataman Victor Vodolatsky of the Don Cossack Host, who attended the opening [9]. Due to its rather peripheral location, the monument did not cause any serious public debate. Local residents, with the exception of left-wing radicals, took this event calmly, which was interpreted as a reconciliation over the Civil War.

In 2005 the monument of “Reconciliation and Harmony” was erected at the main symbolic place of the Don Cossacks – Yermak square in Novocherkassk. It was intended to symbolically cement the resolution of the conflict between the

descendants of the Red and White Cossacks among all 12 Cossack hosts, whose names are listed on the granite pedestals surrounding the sculptural composition. On the front edge of the pedestal, in the center, is engraved “The Great Don Host,” which stands out from all the other hosts listed. On one side of this inscription a *budenovka* hat and a rifle (“reds”) lie, and on the other side, a cap, a saber, and a hood (“whites”). On the separate marble pedestal there is an inscription: “In memory of the past. For the present and future of the Cossacks. We have come to reconciliation and harmony. Thank God, we are Cossacks.” However, despite its name and conceptual inscription, the monument is not about reconciliation.

The composition was unequivocally “white.” It featured a seven-meter Orthodox cross, a Cossack woman in traditional dress, and a boy in cadet uniform. The initiators were Ataman Vodolatsky and Grand Duchess Maria Vladimirovna, head of the Russian Imperial House. At the monument’s unveiling, they were accompanied by the well-known Gennadiy Troshev, Vasiliy Chub, and Anatoly Volkov – the mayor of Novocherkassk and concurrently the district Cossack ataman – as well as several high-ranking clergy and other Cossack atamans. Thus, there were representatives of the federal and regional political elite. The opening coincided with Novocherkassk’s 200th anniversary and the Second World Cossack Congress.

In his speech, Mayor Anatoly Volkov referred to history: “Two million Cossacks died during the turmoil and the revolution. Many of them perished during collectivization and repression. The monument puts an end to all strife among the Russian Orthodox people, among the Cossacks. I believe that we must strive together to make our state the strongest and most powerful” [33]. Volkov referred to the Cossack victim narrative which was formulated in the early 1990s. However, the scholars estimate real Cossack victims at 250–500 thousand [42].

The main point of Volkov’s speech is to convince everyone, especially federal authorities, that the Cossacks are true patriots who wish for state service. Ataman Vodolatsky has also emphasized loyalty and unity, stating that “destructive forces” benefited from Cossack disunity [2]. All his enthusiasm for using the theme of reconciliation among the Cossacks was aimed

at convincing the authorities that he controlled the fragmented movement and he was completely loyal to his Cossacks. This task was successfully accomplished, and Vodolatsky personally met with President Vladimir Putin and even “accepted” him into the Cossacks.

Zone of Conflicts. The Cossack nationalist and civil society activist Vladimir Melikhov became the focus of the memorial conflict between the authorities and Cossacks. In 2004, Melikhov began to construct a memorial dedicated to the Don Cossacks’ struggle against the Bolsheviks on his private property in the village of Elanskaya in the Rostov region, which opened in 2007. Its centerpiece was a statue of Pyotr Krasnov – leader of the Civil War Don Cossack Republic who emigrated to Europe and, during World War II, served Hitler and headed the Main Directorate of Cossack Troops. In Russian cultural memory, Krasnov is associated primarily with collaborationism.

The authorities found a monument to him unacceptable, and Vladimir Melikhov was arrested. However, in 2007, there was no memorial law on criminal liability for justifying Nazism. It was adopted in 2014, aimed at countering attempts to encroach on historical memory regarding the events of World War II, and reflected a view of history through the lens of national security [16; 25; 26]. So Melikhov was charged with tax evasion and released from custody eight months later due to lack of evidence. Melikhov argued the memorial focused on Krasnov’s Civil War role. He eventually replaced the plaque naming Krasnov with a general dedication to “the Don Cossack leaders, officers, Cossacks, and Cossack women who laid down their lives for their faith and their country,” but the statue remained until May, 2025. The memorial also included busts of other White Cossack leaders and crosses labelled “Lienz, June 1, 1945,” “Chataldzhi, 1920–1921,” “Crimea, November 1920,” and “Novorossiysk, April 1920” symbolizing tragic moments for White Cossacks. Melikhov extended the genocide narrative to World War II, interpreting it as a Second Civil War. Although activists claimed not to divide Cossacks into White and Red, they only commemorated anti-Bolshevik victims.

At the memorial entrance there is an inscription: “Eternal memory to the victims of the

Cossack genocide.” The museum’s exhibition reflects the title “Don Cossacks in the Struggle Against the Bolsheviks” and explicitly rejected reconciliation. Vladimir Melikhov formulates its mission: “The museum is like a guide whose task is not to lull memory to sleep, but to awaken it; not to reconcile it with the past, but to stimulate the mind; not to narrate the tragedy, but to analyze it. Museum exhibitions are intended not only, and not so much, to be ‘a feast for the eyes’ but to become ‘food for the mind’ – to make people think, to squeeze out, drop by drop, the poison of prejudice and false dogmas that Soviet ideology has thoroughly imbued the consciousness with” [43]. The exhibition relied on printed materials (posters, photographs, copies of documents) to convey a concentrated victim narrative claiming 4 million Cossack deaths, doubling Vladimir Gromov’s early-1990s figure.

The victim narrative is verified by Bolshevik documents framed on the wall: “Directive on the Suppression of the Cossacks, January 24, 1919”; “Instructions of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Southern Front for the Implementation of the Directive of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on the Fight Against Counterrevolution in the Don Region”; “Order to proceed with fire and sword. Directive of March 17, 1919, on the struggle against the rebellious Cossacks”; “Order of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of May 25, 1919. Sverdlov. (Instruction on executions)”; “RSFSR VSNK (The Council of People’s Commissars of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic – the government of Soviet Russia) Strictly confidential. Order issued by Comrade Dzerzhinsky, Head of the Cheka, on April 10, 1920. The task of the Cheka organs is to ensure that the very word “Cossack” disappears from the Russian language once and for all. The Soviet government must mercilessly and universally destroy and punish the Cossacks as a class hostile to the proletariat. Pres. SNK Ulyanov-Lenin.” On the same level as the documents is the poster with the signature “Yakov Sverdlov” and an image of a man in front of a red banner with the inscription “All power to the Soviets.” Since 1989, the most vivid personified responsibility for the genocide is traditionally attributed to Sverdlov.

These texts are modern prints without references; they are not original documents or

even archival copies. Melikhov said that in the early 1990s the archives were opened, and they “took the part about the Verkhnedonsk uprising, telegrams, directives on de-Cossackization, on how to pacify the Verkhnedonsk Cossacks with fire and sword” [12]. However, a museum assistant admitted copies came from “some unreliable archives.” Thus, while using formal methods of argumentation, the exhibition’s reliability was questionable, functioning more as a museum of memory, where emotions and empathy for the victims play a major role in the victim narrative that is conveyed [41; 44].

The effectiveness of conveying ideas to the audience can be assessed through guest books. I analyzed about 200 reviews, and two topics are common to almost all of them: the exhibition allowed visitors to learn the true history of the Don Cossacks during the Soviet era and pride in “our Cossack museum” among visitors from the Rostov, Volgograd, Krasnodar and Lugansk regions. Its remote location meant visitors deliberately sought out this controversial exhibition.

In Kuban, a memorial conflict erupted over Ataman Vyacheslav Naumenko, who led the Kuban Host abroad from 1920–1958 and preserved its regalia. It was returned to Krasnodar and housed in the Felitsyn Historical and Archaeological Museum from 2007 to 2011, but the story of their return is controversial. During World War II, Naumenko was part of the same collaborationist Cossack Main Directorate as Krasnov, and his name is associated with it in Russia. Although Naumenko did not take part in combat operations, let alone commit war crimes, and was not convicted by any judge except public opinion. According to agreements between Ataman Gromov, who oversaw the process of returning the regalia, and Ataman Naumenko’s daughter Natalya Nazarenko, a commemorative plaque about Naumenko was to be installed in the museum exhibition. As a result, the exhibition features a stand dedicated to the return of the regalia, which highlights the role of Ataman Gromov, but there is no mention of Naumenko.

After the start of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis in 2014, authorities intensified scrutiny of links to Nazism. In 2015, Naumenko’s belongings were removed from the museum, and Cossack societies were ordered to withdraw booklets and posters depicting him [15]. However, in 2012,

after the regalia were finally returned to Krasnodar, Governor Alexander Tkachev and new Ataman of the Kuban Cossack Host Nikolai Doluda unveiled a memorial plaque on the Naumenko family home in the village of Petrovskaya. This sparked a wave of public discontent among the Cossack activists and non-Cossack population of Kuban.

The plaque was removed by a city court decision in 2016 after Tkachev left office [13]. The new governor, Veniamin Kondratyev, also actively uses the Cossack theme in his politics but abandoned references to Naumenko due to securitization of history. Activists attempting to restore Naumenko’s memory were not supported by the state-loyal Cossack leadership. During this period the authorities brought all registered Cossacks under their control. How was the victim narrative about the genocide of the Cossacks used under these circumstances?

Ataman Vladimir Gromov, a key promoter of the genocide narrative, explained its initial instrumental purpose: “It was necessary to enlist the support of those peoples who had been subjected to repression: the Karachays, Nogais, and others. It was necessary to enlist the support of those deputies of the Supreme Council who saw the Cossacks as a patriotic force. But what is meant by Cossacks? An estate is a transient category. Ethnicity is an eternal category, and its abolition means genocide and condemnation by the public and the law. That is why this word was used” [11]. When asked if he believed it was real genocide, Gromov answered, “There is a question here. They not only fought each other, but there was also a Cossack department in the All-Russian Central Executive Committee. That is, the Cossacks were in power there. But I will say that this policy began to be implemented in Kuban in March 1920, when Soviet power was established. These were repressions after the Civil War. Then this policy continued in the 1930s during the famine and the dispossession of the kulaks. Is this genocide or not? Some believe it was genocide, others say it was just repression and persecution of the Cossacks” [11]. Thus, a creator of the narrative, no longer politically active, refused to unequivocally endorse it.

During the 2011 parade in honor of the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the law “On the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples,” Ataman

Doluda began his speech with an appeal to the victim narrative: “At the beginning of the last century, the history of a valiant people – loyal defenders of the Russian state – was interrupted. ...Of the most numerous Cossack Host in Russia – the Kuban, which numbered 1.3 million people – just over 200,000 remained after the Civil War! Over the 20 years of the revival of cadet corps, we have raised a whole generation of young Cossacks. We pass on to them the identity of the Cossacks as a part of the great Russian people, instilling in them our culture and traditions. Once again, we are serving our country, defending its borders” [34]. The word “genocide” is not used officially, although the Cossacks are referred to as a distinct people, but only in connection with the defense of Russia.

Results. In the first stage of institutionalization, the political use of the past was crucial for Cossack activists to legitimize their place in the socio-political system. The narrative of genocide during the Civil War was a tool to gain recognition as a distinct people, enabling claims to property and autonomy, which were granted to rehabilitated peoples.

The division within the Cossack movement in the 1990s – 2000s was not based on sympathies for Reds or Whites from 1918–1921. The memory of the Civil War itself did not cause the split, as the victim narrative was consensual. It was instrumentalized by all societies for negotiations with authorities. The main dividing line was the issue of state service. This “reconciliation” was largely rhetorical. The revival movement did not include Red Cossacks supporting the original communist idea [14]. The erection of the Monument of

Reconciliation and Harmony had no effect on this. The Red Cossacks of the Civil War did not take their place alongside the White heroes in the collective memory of the revived Cossacks.

With the formation of the state service system for “registered” Cossacks in the 2000s – 2010s, leaders stopped using the genocide narrative for political gain. The theme of Cossack victims remained, but the emphasis shifted to overcoming suffering and heroic revival for Russia. The bureaucratization of the revival process led to the displacement of the victim narrative from official discourse and the dominance of a heroic narrative based on service to the Fatherland.

The agonistic principle of memory politics was replaced by an antagonistic approach. The victim narrative, where it persisted, was reconceptualized as part of the heroic narrative. In 2012, President Vladimir Putin expressed this at the highest level: “After the 1917 revolution, the Cossacks were subjected to the most brutal repression, in essence, genocide. However, the Cossacks survived, preserving their culture and traditions. And the task of the state is to help the Cossacks in every way possible, to involve them in military service and the military-patriotic education of the young people” [35]. The victim narrative ceased to be a political tool for obtaining preferences. It remains in the commemorative practices of non-registered Cossacks outside the power vertical. Some Cossack nationalists extend the victim narrative to World War II, conceptualizing it as a Second Civil War, a narrative suppressed by authorities, with its proponents facing legal proceedings.

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