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# SERVUR'A AND KRYM'A (CRIMEAN ROMA) AS INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF UKRAINE

The Roma are an internally differentiated "intergroup ethnic formation" consisting of distinct subethnic groups, of which each possesses its own social and cultural characteristics (Marushiakova 2008). There are currently at least ten Roma subethnic groups living in Ukraine: *Sérvur'a*, *Krým'a*, *Vláxur'a*, *Kišyn'ovár'e*, *Lovára*, *Rúska Romá*, *Kotľár'a*, *Plaśúna*, *Ursár'a*, and *Hímpeny* (Cherenkov 2008; Makhotina & Panchenko 2020). In 2021, the Verkhovna Rada (Supreme Council) of Ukraine passed Act No. 1616-IX, entitled "On Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine", whereby three groups of people, the Crimean Tatars, the Karaites and the Krymchaks, each became recognised as indigenous people of Ukraine. The Act outlined the criteria for recognition as being an "autochthonous ethnic community that was formed in the territory of Ukraine, is a bearer of its distinctive language and culture; has traditional, social, cultural or representative bodies; identifies itself as an indigenous people of Ukraine; forms an ethnic minority within Ukraine's population and has no state formation of its own outside Ukraine" (Act No. 1616-IX). There are, however, at least two other ethnic groups in Ukraine that meet all these characteristics of an indigenous people as set out in the Act and can therefore be regarded as indigenous peoples of Ukraine. These are Sérvur'a and Krým'a (Crimean Roma).[1]

This article examines the principal socio-cultural characteristics (namely: geographic, linguistic, material and spiritual culture, experience of collective trauma) of these ethnic groups to establish that Servur'a and Krym'a meet the criteria for recognition as indigenous people of Ukraine. In doing so, we draw on our own

[1] Hereinafter we shall refer to the Roma ethnic groups by their endonyms, using the transliteration of Romani terms that are standard for Roma studies, even though the names Sérvur'a and Krým'a are better rendered into English as Servuria and Krymia.

ethnographic field research and sociological surveys conducted in Servur'a and Krym'a communities from 2016–2022.[2]

## THE PROBLEM OF DEFINING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

A widely-accepted definition of indigenous people has remained elusive since the matter was first formally debated during the preparation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Martinez 1987). At the time, the UN's expert panel concluded that, due to the complex sets of circumstances specific to ethnic groups across the world, it would be too difficult to provide a "universal" definition of indigenous people. In contrast, in his 1987 study of discrimination against indigenous populations, José Martínez Cobo offered this following definition:

> Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems (Martinez 1987, p. 29).

Cobo's research, and thus his definition, was grounded in New World indigenous experience and was difficult to apply to other cases. For instance the definitions "pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies" do not fit for all countries. Professor Erica-Irene Daes suggests a number of criteria that could be used as a basis for defining the term "indigenous people":

> the voluntary perpetuation of cultural distinctiveness, which may include aspects of language, social organisation, spiritual values, modes of production, laws and institutions; self-identification as a distinct collectivity; an experience of subjugation, marginalisation, dispossession, exclusion or discrimination, whether or not these conditions persist (Daes 1996).

Again, this definition still retains some distinctive and thus exclusionary features.

Benedict Kingsbury, an academic on the rights of indigenous peoples in international law (1998) analyses different criteria concerning the concept of "indigenous nations", and proposes to divide them into two categories: "essential requirements" and "relevant

[2] The ethnographic field trips were part of two projects *Ethnosociological Research of the Roma Population of Kherson Region* (Renaissance Foundation and Roma Education Fund) and *Materielle Unterstützung von Opfern des Genozids an den Roma in der Region Cherson* (with the financial support of EVZ Foundation, Latscho Diwes Program). The former was focused on gathering information about folk traditions and ritual holidays of Roma in Southern Ukraine; the peculiarities of spoken language in different groups; and the social structure of these communities. Thirty in-depth interviews were conducted as part of the program entitled "War, Migration and Memory" (financed by Forum Transregionale Studien), which were aimed at exploring the influence of the Russian-Ukrainian war on Romani identity.

indicia". The essential requirements for indigenous status are: self-identification as a distinct ethnic group; historical experience of, or contingent vulnerability to, severe disruption, dislocation or exploitation; long connection with the region; the wish to retain a distinct identity (Kingsbury 1998).

In her endeavour to establish the Crimean Tatars' right to the status of "indigenous people of Ukraine", Natalia Belitser emphasises the significance of the following criteria: the group's self-identification; group consciousness; experience of forced displacement from the historic homeland (Belitser 2017).

For the authors of the Ukrainian *Act on the Indigenous Peoples*, which was initiated by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the "area of formation" was an essential factor: "The indigenous peoples of Ukraine that were formed in the territory of the Crimean peninsula are the Crimean Tatars, the Karaites, and the Krymchaks" (Act No. 1616-IX). Since the Crimean peninsula lies wholly within the borders of Ukraine, the abovementioned Crimean ethnic groups were formed entirely within the territory of present-day Ukraine; this, presumably, was the logic of the legislators. Furthermore, the Act states that only an "ethnic community" can be legally recognised as an indigenous people.

Given the status of the term "indigenous people" in international law and the national standards that apply in each particular case, we shall regard the criteria listed in the Ukrainian Act No. 1616-IX as the crucial ones guiding our argument here, and those set forth in the UN documents as the supplementary criteria to help contextualise the principal criteria in the paper.

## ARE THE SERVUR'A AND KRÝM'A ETHNIC COMMUNITIES THAT WERE FORMED IN THE TERRITORY OF UKRAINE? (ACT NO. 1616-IX)

The first criterion mention in the Act "On Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine", that allows us to classify an ethnic group as an "indigenous people" is territory, where the group was formed. Servur'a are the most widespread Roma group in Ukraine.[3] The main area of their settlement is Left-Bank Ukraine, especially Slobozhanschyna (Sloboda Ukraine) and Donschyna (the Don region).[4] Depending on the historic area of their dissemination, Servur'a are divided into six main subgroups: *Poltavcí* (from the former Poltava Governorate of Russian Empire), *Tavryčány* (former Taurida Governorate), *Kylmyšý* (Western Central Dnieper Ukraine), and *Sérvy-Zadnipr'any (*Eastern Central Dnieper Ukraine), *Vorón*'ežski *Sérvy* (former Voronezh Governorate). Another distinct subgroup, *Horodskí Sérvy* (Eng. urban Servur'a), includes all the

[3] Endonyms: *Sérvy, Sérvur'a, Servícki Romá,* singular: *Sérv(o), Sérvica,* adjective: *Servícko*.

[4] Left-Bank Ukraine refers to the geographic region on the left bank of the Dnipro river (looking south, following the flow of the river) that corresponds to parts of Northern, Eastern and Southern Ukraine.

Servur'a families that adopted a sedentary way of life between the mid-eighteenth and early twentieth centuries (Makhotina & Panchenko 2019; 2020).

Servur'a are among the first Roma groups to have appeared in the territory of Ukraine. They were formed as a separate group under the influence of the Ukrainian language and literature, and have become an exclusively Ukrainian Romani group, as evidenced by their second endonym; most of their subgroups (with the exception of the Voronezh Servur'a) refer to themselves as *Ukráinski Romá* ("Ukrainian Roma").

Photograph 1: Krym'a, possibly the city of Kakhovka, in the 1980s. It may appear to an outside observer that the Roma feel like descendants of Indians. There have been many academic publications on the Indian origins of the European Roma, but this theory has not been part of Romani identity in Ukraine. However, the Indian style occurred as a fad both among Servur'a and Krym'a until the early 2000s. Source: Yanush Panchenko's personal archives. Author unknown.

It is important to distinguish between "the Roma of Crimea" and "the Crimean Roma". The former describes all the Roma who lived or who are living in Crimea, while the latter denotes one specific Roma subethnic group, whose self-designated names are *Krýmy*, *Krýmsk'a Romá*, *and Krým'a* (singular: *Krym* (m) *Krýmka* (f)) and who form the focus of the following discussion.

As a distinct ethnic subgroup, Crimean Roma were primarily formed through their contact with Crimean Tatar culture, Ukrainian and Russian cultural influences had a similar, if somewhat lesser, impact on the Crimean Roma. The majority of Krym'a are currently living outside the Crimean peninsula, in Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv, Odesa regions of Ukraine and in Krasnodar Krai, Sverdlovsk, Samara, and Tula regions

of the Russian Federation, as well as in Kazakhstan. Just as Servur'a, Krym'a are divided into subgroups, although there is no academic consensus on this division. In current scholarship, the names of these subgroups are mixed with the names of large clans.[5]

## ARE THE SERVUR'A AND KRÝM'A BEARERS OF ITS DISTINCTIVE LANGUAGE? (ACT NO. 1616-IX)

The second criterion that allows us to classify an ethnic group as an "indigenous people" is the possession of a distinct language. Except for those languages that developed in isolation and which cannot be classified within the framework of broader linguistic groupings, Romani dialects can be divided into four main groups: Vlach, Balkan, Northern and Central (Matras 1995). This classification can be problematic however, as different authors classify the Servur'a dialect in sometimes conflicting ways: some think it belongs to the Vlach group, others to the Central group. There is good reason for this ambivalence, as the Servur'a dialect has features typical of both dialect groups. Regardless of this minor controversy, the Servur'a dialect can still be subdivided into at least four sub-dialects.[6] All of this is to suggest that the complex internal differentiation of these dialects does indeed indicate the presence of a distinctive language community that conforms to the criteria of the act for recognition of indigenous peoples. In what follows we offer a brief overview of what makes the Servur'a dialect, and by extension, its sub-dialects, so distinctive.

The Servur'a dialect has had strong contact with several Southern Slavic languages, as seen in terms like *bába* (grandmother), *katúna* (tent), and has retained many Romanian loanwords, too, as in *mýca* (cat), *feĺástra* (window), *róta* (wheel), *úrma* (surname). Its most recent shaping, however, took place through its contact with the Ukrainian language. Contemporary scholars of Servur'a note that they also often speak Ukrainian and a mixed Russian-Ukrainian dialect (see Cherenkov 2008). Such a description is not entirely accurate, though, as it would imply, wrongly, that the language that part of the Servur`a population uses is identical to the dominant language surrounding them. Unlike the surrounding Ukrainian language, the Servur'a dialect has Romani lexical units and entire phrases adjusted to Ukrainian grammar. One of the notable

[5] Vadim Toropov gives the following list of Crimean Roma subgroups, also based on the areas of their formation: *Kyrymlýdes*, *Herišlýdes*, *G'ozuĺúdes* (according to our informants, this word form is incorrect; the correct form is *Gozuvlúdes*), *Orlúdes*, *Hohoídes*, *Džunďukéja*, *Kefelýdes*, *Kyrlýdes*, *Baré paněngere*, *Kišajalé*, *Kubanlúdes/Kubanlýdes*, and *Čornomorlúdes* (Toropov 2009). We suggest two additional groups that could be classed as Krymian subgroups: *Arýk'a* and *Koraín'a*. Furthermore, the term *Kyrymlýdes* needs to be clarified: it may indeed be the name of a Krymian subgroup, or else it might be a general name for the whole Crimean Roma community, along with the term Krym'a.

[6] *Sérvy-Zadnipr'any, Poltavcí* and *Horodskí Sérvy* lost their sub-dialects, having retained only occasional lexemes of Romani origin. *Tavryčány*'s situation is similar, but in some places one can still encounter native speakers of this sub-dialect.

features of Servur'a is the presence of Ukrainian words and phrases that are literal loan translations of Romani ones: *jísty na sobí mjáso* (*їсти на собі́ мя́со*, lit. "to eat one's own flesh") means "to feel nervous", a calque from the Romani *"xal per péste mas"*.[7]

Furthermore, unlike in the surrounding language (Ukrainian and the Ukrainian-Russian dialect), a considerable segment of Slavic vocabulary connotes taboo subjects such as genitalia and bodily discharges in the Servur'a dialect thus rely heavily on allusion to remain in everyday use. For instance, "egg", "hen", "pour", or "sausage", are referred to using euphemisms drawn from both Romani and Slavic sources. For egg, Servur'a say *bilén'ke* (Ukr. whitish) or *parnoró* (Rom. whitish). For hen, *let'úča* (Ukr. a flying one)[8] or *kahní* (Rom. a hen) must be used.[9]


Photograph 2. Servur'a. Beryslav, 2021. Center: Leonid Dejnega. Right: Oleksandra Sizonenko (with a white headscarf on her shoulders). Both survived the Roma genocide during WWII. Their family members were killed by German soldiers.[10] The inscription on the garage says Baxtaló drom (Rom. a happy journey [to you]). Photo by Samira Tymchenko.

[7] Other examples include: *xodyt' važká* (*ходить важка*, lit. walks around heavy) means "is pregnant" – a calque from the Romani *phirél pharí*; *bilén'ke* (*біленьке*, literally: whitish) means a chicken egg – a calque from the Romani *parnoró*.

[8] Ukrainian word *kurka* (Ukr. a hen) is used in argot with meaning "vulva".

[9] Other examples include: instead of pour, *sýpat'* (Ukr. to pour smth granular); instead of sausage, *kovbásy* (Ukr. sausages) or *gojá* (Rom. sausages), that is, the word "sausage" is only used in its plural (either Romani or Ukrainian) form.

[10] Kali Traš, Testimonies of the Genocide of Roma: Leonid Dejnega and Vursova Marus'a. www.youtube.com/watch?v=ED6Fyuv2tJ8&t=176s&ab_channel=%D0%AF%D0%BD%D1%83%D1%88%D0%9F%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BA%D0%BE (accessed: 01.04.2023).

The Crimean Romani dialect is the only Romani dialect in Ukraine that belongs to the Balkan group, having come under in contact with South Slavic languages and the Crimean Tatar languages. The percentage of words of Crimean Tatar origin is probably as high as 36% (Bessonov 2000). Vadim Toropov distinguishes four sub-dialects of the Crimean Romani dialect: *Kyrymlýdes Hohoídes*, *Kubanlúdes/ Kubanlýdes*, *Čornomorlúdes* (Toropov 2003). Active contact between the Roma and the surrounding population, however, has always resulted not only in the Roma borrowing lexical items from the surrounding language but also vice versa. Romani loanwords are to be found in most European languages, including Ukrainian and Russian. For instance, many Ukrainian and Russian argots use such Romani loanwords as *lavé* (money), *xávaty* (to eat), *rakló* (young non-Romani man; in Ukrainian and Russian it has the meaning of "uncouth person", or "boor").[11]

## ARE THE SERVURʹA AND KRÝMʹA BEARERS OF DISTINCTIVE CULTURE? (ACT NO. 1616-IX)

### Material culture of Servurʹa and Krýmʹa

Distinctive culture is the third criterion that defines indigenous people according to the Act No. 1616-IX. Servurʹa and Krymʹa both provide further evidence that both groups continue to be bearers of a distinctive, contemporary, material culture grounded in tradition, for instance in their clothing and interior design, through specific household items, and in their cuisine. Other local artefacts and distinguishing practices provide even more compelling evidence to support the two groups' official recognition as indigenous groups by Ukraine.

A tradition of wearing garb has been better preserved in the Krymian communities; Servurʹa have only partially retained it. Krymʹa women start wearing a headscarf after marriage to symbolise their marital status, while among the Servurʹa, this tradition was already dying out in the 1970s; nowadays, only the oldest Servurʹa women (65+) wear headscarves. Conversely, Servurʹa girls and young women continue to wear long or medium-length skirts, and shorter skirts or dresses (above the knee), as well as trousers, are not permitted for Servurʹa girls above fifteen years of age. Adult Krymian women only wear long clothes.

[11] Furthermore, the verb *labáty* (to play a musical instrument) is derived from the Romani word *dilábel/diľabál* ([he/she] sings, plays [an instrument]); *čuvak* (guy, dude) is derived from *čhavó* (boy, son) (Barannikov 1931).

Photograph 3: Krymian people in the village of Lyubymivka (Kherson region), 2021. Author: Volodymyr Panchenko.

A young Servur'a man is not likely to look different from non-Romani youngsters, even though there are some clothing restrictions for men, for instance Romani men typically do not wear shorts. Krymian and older Servur`a men wear characteristic caps known as *kapitánka*, or sheepskin hats known as *kubánka.* Among middle-aged and older Servur'a and Krym'a, one can still see people with golden teeth, which in the recent past was a symbol of wealth, and people used to even have gold caps put on healthy teeth.

Traditional Romani dishes were influenced in part by contact with Ukrainian cuisine. Servur'a traditional dishes for example are mostly based on Ukrainian cuisine, with certain modifications: *cyhánskyj boršč* ("Roma borsch", a cold fish borsch); *štrúnh'eli/šmúndi* (casserole made with boiled dough instead of potatoes), *žarkóje* (casserole), *pyrožn'a* (Christmas pudding), *vúška/kanoré* (dumplings with twisted edges). While Servur'a cuisine overlaps with Ukrainian cuisine, Crimean Roma cuisine, in contrast, shares much more with Crimean Tatars'. However, all Romani subgroups in Ukraine have a common culinary feature: a great number of meat and dough-based dishes.

Among the traditional dishes of the Crimean Roma, one should mention *jantýk'a*. A dish of the same name (*yantıq*) is well-known in Crimean Tatar cuisine: small, flat, meat turnovers, fried on a pan. The Crimean Roma *jantýk'a* differ from the Crimean Tatar ones in shape (the Romani ones are round) and cooking method (the Romani ones are deep-fried). Other traditional dishes of the Krym'a include *kiík'a* (shortcake

with raisins), *košekboréḱa* (small dumplings), *adalmádes* (*unleavened dough*, *cooked* in *boiling* water and stuffed with duck), *kanzúrka* (fried hedgehog meat) etc. The last one is rarely cooked now.

Families often keep heirlooms. In Servur'a families, for example, these would be *masxár'a* (icons), whereas in Krym'an families would keep *xamalíja* (a little bag containing a verse from the Qur'an). People also keep various objects related to the nomadic lifestyle of their parents and earlier ancestors, such as a *katúna* (tent), means of transport (various types of horse-drawn carts), traditional handcrafted goods and tools made by the Roma artisans themselves. During our field trips, we have seen such objects as leather harnesses, whips, leathercrafter's vices, horseshoes among other items, that capture a tradition of farriery that stretches back through this material culture to the nineteenth century.

### Spiritual culture of Servur'a and Krým'a

The Krym'a are traditionally Muslim, while the Servur'a are traditionally Orthodox Christian. However, in both groups, these religions have a number of folk features, and customs vary widely in different subgroups, clans and even individual families, highlighting the ongoing, distinctive and fluid interactions with the dominant religious cultures that surround them.

For most members of these communities, such a formula as "We, Krym'a, are Muslim" or "We, Servur'a, are Orthodox Christian" is enough of a profession of faith without further elaboration. The particular denomination of Islam (Sunni or Shia, the relevant Madhhab, or authority it is administratively subordinate to) or of Orthodox Christianity (whether it belongs to the Patriarchate of Moscow, of Constantinople, or another Patriarchate) is seemingly irrelevant. Doctrinal issues and administrative subordination of the religious institution do not play any significant role in the religious life of the Servur'a and the Krym'a; church or mosque regular attendance is equally unimportant. It is normal practice among Muslim Krym'a to attend an Orthodox church if there is no mosque in their city (although they are not allowed to cross themselves). Some Krymian homes even have Orthodox icons hanging on the walls. For a Servur'a Roma, it does not matter which church they attend, that is, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church or the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Indeed, Servur'a who have migrated to Europe fleeing to the Russian invasion have begun in some cases to attend Catholic churches.

Christian baptisms in Servur'a communities are carried out most frequently during the first year after birth, but they can also take place later, between the ages of six and fifteen. Sometimes baptisms of children also occur among the Krym'a. Notably, the Krym'a do not practise circumcision.

In Krymian and Servur'a communities, religiosity does manifest itself in food taboos. As Muslims, Krym'a do not eat pork, but they do eat horse meat. As Christians, Servur'a can eat any kind of meat, but they have their own prohibition against

horse meat, which might be explained by the Servur'a sacralisation of horses. In the ethnographic literature, one can find descriptions of Servur'a rituals involving horses, e.g. bringing a horse into the house for Christmas or baking special bread for horses.

Servur'a ritual holidays are related to the main Christian Orthodox holidays and Ukrainian traditions in general. As for Ukrainian secular national holidays, the Roma do not celebrate them (Makhotina and Panchenko 2020). Among the most important Servur'a ritual holidays is *Páska/Patradí*[12] (Easter), which, a week later, lengthens into the commemoration of the dead. Roma Easter has its own distinct folk features, for instance as a family reunion event. For *Páska*, the Servur'a bake *páskas*, cylinder-shaped Easter cakes, which are two to three times bigger then *páskas* baked by Ukrainians. The custom of baking a *páska* for Easter sometimes also occurs among Krym'a who have family ties with Servur'a. Other important and distinctive Servur'a holidays are *Sv'atýj véčir* (Ukr. Holy Evening) or Christmas Eve (January 6th), *Rožestvó/Krečúno* (Christmas, January 7th), *Melánka* (January 13th), *Cyhánskyj Nóvyj Hod* (Roma New Year, January 14th).

Photograph 4: *Paskas*. They are baked in special ovens; some families have them, so friends and relatives come visiting from other cities and even regions to bake *paskas* in their ovens. Photograph by Christina Miller, 2015.

The main Krymian holidays are Jilbáši and Jagor'á. Jilbáši is the Crimean Roma New Year, celebrated on January 14th. On this day, young people visit each other

[12] Two names for one feast – in Ukrainian-Romani fusion and Servur`a Romani dialect.

and sing a ritual song, *Šaramazáni*. Jagor'á is the day of commemoration of the dead and falls on the Thursday before Orthodox Easter. On this day, the Krym'a make special memorial coffee; they also make a bonfire in the courtyard and jump over it. As for Muslim holidays per se, such as Kurban Bayram, Uraza Bayram and so on, the Krym'a do not celebrate them and, in fact, generally know very little about them.

The customs that remain closely connected with Romani religious life are burials and commemorations, though Servur'a funeral customs are very similar to those of the surrounding population. People keep vigil in the house where the deceased lies. The funeral usually takes place on the day after death. The body is put into a coffin and buried, where the grave is covered with earth. Servur'a first put a wooden cross on the grave and later erect a tombstone. Relatives of the deceased organise memorial dinners on the ninth and the fortieth day after death, as well as for the six-month and one-year anniversaries.

The Crimean Roma, however, have a different burial tradition. A Krymian funeral usually takes place on the seventh day after death, although sometimes earlier. The grave, between 10-12m$^2$, is recreated as a replica of a typical room of a flat, with actual furniture, household appliances, decorations, and other belongings of the deceased, like gold jewellery. Although the dead body used traditionally to be wrapped in a carpet, the custom of putting the body into a coffin is becoming more common now. The grave is not filled with earth; instead, it is covered in with a reinforced steel ceiling and then more concrete is poured over that. A wake takes place on the third, seventh, fortieth, and hundredth day, as well as on the one-year anniversary of the death. Sometimes an iron stele with a crescent and a star is erected soon after on the grave.

Another aspect of traditional religious culture is the practice of ritual purity, known as *mahrimó* among the Servur'a, and *harámi* among the Krym'a. The system of ritual purity is complicated and multifaceted. Taboos largely relate to the impurity of the lower body, primarily that of a married fertile woman, since they believe that a woman is less pure than a man, while children are believed to be the purest creatures. Traditionally, then, women wore several skirts and an apron, although this tradition, as detailed above, has considerably diminished. For the same reason, *mahrimó* forbids washing underwear together with outer garments, footwear together with any other pieces of clothing and face towels together with bath towels—the list continues. It is also forbidden to use a utensil if an animal has eaten from it. It is forbidden to share a drinking vessel with a person who has been excluded from the Roma community, or with those non-Roma whose lifestyle is incompatible with the principles of *mahrimó*. Furthermore, within the framework of ritual purity, there exists an idea of a *neighborhood of objects*: for example, a towel and a dirty garment cannot even be placed in the same compartment of a bag, if they would not technically touch while there.

## DO THE SERVUR'A AND KRÝM'A HAVE REPRESENTATIVE BODIES? (ACT NO. 1616-IX)

The next criterion that allows us to classify an ethnic group as an "indigenous people" is the presence of traditional, social, cultural or representative bodies. Even though the Roma encampment (a clan, a group consisting of several families who travel or live together) as a traditional social unit has effectively ceased to exist in Servur'a and Krym'a communities, some of its elements persist to this day, namely its legal system and various ways of exercising power. Both the Servur'a and the Krym'a have a number of self-governing structures, which are both traditional and modern, and act unofficially as well as officially.

Self-governance within Roma communities is different from what most Ukrainians may imagine. There is a common misconception in Ukraine that the unofficial leaders, the so-called "barons", govern Roma communities. In the minds of the surrounding population, a "Romani baron" is usually an authoritarian man who often resorts to unlawful methods to expand his influence. In present-day Servur'a and Krym'a communities, there are, of course, respected and reputable men whose opinion is taken into account, for instance, *syndomár'a* (experts on Roma judicial affairs), but these people do not have any real authority.

The most powerful and influential institution is the "Roma court", known as *sýndo* in Servur`a and *séndo* in Kryma dialects. It is still typical for the wider Roma, including the Krym'a and the Servur'a, to meet in assembly to resolve serious internal social issues. This assembly is indeed considered a Roma court, dealing with conflicts such as property disputes and family matters and can act as a mediator, where members of the Roma community hear both sides of a dispute and arbitrate a solution. If necessary, the defendant will swear an oath as a last resort of resolving a litigation matter, and the highest penalty can be the exclusion of the offender from the community.

Both the Servur'a and the Krym'a have their own official organisations too. In the 1990s, Romani "ethnocultural associations" began to appear in Ukraine; they have the status of public organisations and position themselves as representative bodies in relations between Roma communities and official agencies like local government bodies, charitable foundations, other (i.e. non-Romani) ethnocultural associations, public councils under the government offices. Formally, any person from any Romani group can join these organisations. In practice, however, local (city and regional) Romani ethnocultural associations are subethnic, representing either the subgroup that is the largest in number locally, or the subgroup to which their leader belongs.[13]

Neither the Servur'a, nor the Krym'a, nor the Roma in general, are state entities. For the Roma, the absence of a state or autonomy within a state—moreover, the absence

[13] Some prominent Servur`a organisations in Ukraine include: *Lačo Drom* (Zaporizhzhia), *Arca* (Kremenchuk), *Society of Tsyhans of the Southern Region "Romano Than"* (Kakhovka), *Roma of Ukraine "Ternipe"* (Lviv). A prominent Crimean Roma organisation is *Amaro Kher* (Pavlohrad).

of a desire to have either a state or autonomy—is not a sign of some deficiency but a cultural feature. Similarly, not harbouring state ambitions is not a weakness for Roma but one of the idiosyncratic cultural characteristics of their community. Some of the social principles forming part of the *romanipé* code[14] include, among other things, not serving in the army, the police, state security forces, judicial institutions, or at the prosecutor's office, is rooted in this existential and political ambiguity, although these principles are beginning to change, as we discuss below.

## ARE THE SERVUR'A AND KRÝM'A ETHNIC COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE TRAUMATIC HISTORICAL EXPERIENCES?

While the historical experience of dislocation, forced displacement from the historic homeland, experience of exclusion or discrimination, belonging to non-dominant sectors of society and other traumatic experiences as criteria of indigenous people are not included in Act No. 1616, they are discussed as part of the above-mentioned international definitions (Martinez 1987; Daes 1996; Kingsbury 1998; Belitser 2017). We consider such criteria for our argument.

These two groups' claims to indigenous status may also draw on traumatic historical experiences that form part of both Servur`a and Krymian recent history. The genocide of the Roma by the Nazis during WWII, the deportation of the Crimean Roma from Crimea in 1944 and the USSR's campaign to put an end to the traditional Roma lifestyle are three such atrocities that merit greater attention here.

Kalí Traš ("black horror") is the Romani name for the Roma genocide. For Servur'a and Krym'a, the Second World War meant civilian casualties and forced removal from their historic lands. During the 1944 deportation, as the Krym'a were regarded as Crimean Tatars – since they were Muslim and spoke the Crimean Tatar language – they were exiled to Central Asia,[15] along with Crimean Tatars and other ethnic groups living in Crimea (Germans, Greeks, Bulgarians, and Armenians).

Subsequent Soviet campaigns to settle the Roma resulted in the destruction of their nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyles. The best-known campaign started in 1956 after the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) had issued the decree "On Engaging *Vagrant Tsygans* in *Labour" (*Voitenko & Tiahlyy, 2018*). Failure to comply with the decree was punishable by deportation for a term of five years, combined with* hard labour. For Krym'a and Servur'a, this decree actually had some positive consequences, where illiteracy decreased, access to healthcare improved, begging ceased to be a common way of making a living. There were, however, a number of negative consequences too, as nomadic Roma experienced judicial persecution, their habitual way of living was destroyed, and they were

[14] A complex of notions defining "Romanipe" (Krym. *romanipé*; Serv. *romanimó*) and "non-Romanipe" (Krym. *gadžipé*; Serv. *gadžimó*).

[15] They were exiled particularly to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan.

forced into new Soviet-approved forms of labour such as collective farming. These changes affected their traditional culture and way of life, and led to the gradual loss of their traditional trades like smithery, horse-trading, leathercraft, basket-weaving and fortune-telling.

In an independent Ukraine, Krym'a and Servur'a became more involved in different fields of public life. Initially, the main field of activity both for Servur'a and for Krym'a was trade in consumer goods (clothes, bed linen, haberdashery). They traded locally as well as in farther-flung places such as Western Ukraine, Crimea, and Russia. Other popular activities were scrap-metal collection, buying gold, and fortune-telling. After the Russian-Ukrainian war broke out in 2014, most Krym'a and Servur'a lost their habitual sales markets in Crimea and Russia, so many Servur'a, as well as other Ukrainian residents, became labour migrants in Europe.[16]

Until 2014, Donbas region was one of the main settling areas for Ukrainian Servur'a, and Donetsk itself had been the unofficial centre of Servur'a culture in Ukraine and Russia. After 2014, broader Servur'a connections with Roma living in the occupied parts of Donbas were largely severed and Donetsk's cultural significance to the Servur'a diminished. Those Roma who remained Ukrainian citizens were no longer able to enter the territory of the so-called LPR and DRP (Luhansk People's Republic and Donetsk People's Republic). For those Roma remaining in occupied Donbas, travelling to the rest of Ukraine became very difficult, because they needed to cross a frontline. Further splintering these groups, the occupation meant that part of the Servur'a population chose to leave these occupied areas and move to neighbouring Ukrainian regions, while another part moved to Russia—specifically, to the Rostov-on-Don and Moscow regions. The majority, however, remained where they had always been.[17]

Over the last thirty years, increasing levels of discrimination and hate speech in the media have been documented in places where Servur'a and especially Krym'a live, culminating more recently in open conflict and physical fights between Romani and non-Romani citizens.[18] Sadly, the feeling of being discriminated against is a characteristic one for the Ukrainian Roma. Although there have been occasions when Servur'a became village and city council deputies, neither Servur'a nor Krym'a are represented in their local governmental authorities (councils and executive committees).

After February 24, 2022, Servur'a and Krym'a from the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine found themselves either in the combat zone or the occupied area. A significant number of Roma had to leave their homes, and while some of

[16] Yanush Panchenko's fieldwork.

[17] Yanush Panchenko's fieldwork

[18] For instance: Bandu nakryly u Chaplyntsi. Novakahovka.city, 27.10.2021, https://novakahovka.city/articles/171829/bandu-nakrili-v-chaplinci?fbclid=IwAR37GWPuG9kQU03TajvXdOtMUIXElc-4J6waGTOw622M-HL8poyquQjoRh2o (accessed: 07.10.2023).

Rozdolyans'ki viyny. Kakhovka Kryminal'na. Facebook-group https://www.facebook.com/groups/kakhovka.kruminalna (accessed 07.10.2023).

them were able to go to territories under the Ukrainian government's control, others had to travel to European countries. Despite the generally positive attitude of European countries towards migrants from Ukraine, there have been reports of human rights violations against Roma in Europe, in particular in the Czech Republic[19] and Hungary.[20] The most tragic aspect of the Romani plight, however, is the situation in the occupied territories of Ukraine, where the Roma population mostly consists of Servur'a and Krym'a. The media have repeatedly reported on Roma falling victim to the Russian occupiers.[21]

However, the history of Roma in the occupied territories is not only one of victimisation.[22] The participation of Roma in Ukraine's armed resistance and their maintenance of public order in Ukraine deserves special attention. Since the summer of 2022, the Ukrainian media have been reporting stories about Roma serving in the Ukrainian Armed Forces, the National Police of Ukraine, and volunteer organisations. It is not always possible to identify the Romani group to which the protagonists of these stories belong, but there have definitely been Servur'a[23] and Krym'a[24] among them.

## DISCUSSION

Despite what we feel is a compelling case for the inclusion of these two groups under the aegis of Ukrainian legislative protection, there is one point that remains to be addressed. Can the Krym'a and the Servur'a can be properly called ethnic groups or it would be better to use a term such as "(sub-) ethnic Romani group". However, even if were to engage with this discussion about stable nomenclature, the debate itself cannot influence the decision to grant indigenous status. Simply put, the Krymchaks and the Karaites, who are on the list of indigenous peoples of Ukraine, are in any case often classified as sub-ethnic groups themselves. The ethnic

[19] https://romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-mayor-makes-openly-racist-statement-that-her-town-just-wants-white-refugees-from-ukraine-not-children-and-women-of (accessed: 01.04.2023).

[20] https://adcmemorial.org/en/news/hungary-discriminatory-practices-against-roma-refugees-from-ukraine/ (accessed: 01.04.2023).

[21] https://tsn.ua/ukrayina/v-okupovaniy-makiyivci-vbili-sim-yu-z-vismoh-lyudey-chetvero-z-nih-diti-zlochin-mogli-vchiniti-viyskovi-rf-2231572.html (accessed: 01.04.2023).

https://vchaspik.ua/regiony/535673-kak-v-tretem-reyhe-v-lisichanske-okkupanty-ubili-cyganskogo-barona?amp (accessed: 01.04.2023).

[22] Another vivid episode of the war is linked with Krym'a. One of the most remarkable news items of the first days of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine was the news that Roma had stolen a Russian tank. On February 27th, the Ukrainian TV channel 1+1 announced in its newscast that this event had taken place in the village of Lyubymivka, Kakhovsky district, Kherson region; there is, indeed, a large community of Crimean Roma living there, and it is to them that the tank theft was attributed.

[23] https://www.irishtimes.com/world/europe/2023/01/18/if-not-me-then-who-ukraines-roma-defy-prejudice-to-join-fight-against-russian-invasion/ (accessed: 01.04.2023).

[24] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WwzMy7XwO8E (accessed: 01.04.2023).

belonging of the Krymchaks and (Crimean) Karaites is therefore currently unclear, because, even though many researchers consider both groups to be separate ethnic groups, some scholars have also argued for classing them as sub-ethnic ethno-denominational communities of Jewish descent.[25] By the standard set in Ukrainian law, then, and as we have laid out here, both the Krym'a and the Servur'a deserve this serious consideration, for their own good, and for the good of a more equitable Ukraine that honours its citizens justly, to be included and recognised fully as meriting indigenous status.

## CONCLUSION

The two groups discussed in this article, Krym'a and Servur'a, are (sub-) ethnic groups that meet all the national, and international, criteria for classifying an ethnic group as an indigenous people. Both groups were formed within the territory of Ukraine, and are predominantly based in Ukraine; they are bearers of distinctive languages and cultures; they have traditional, social, cultural and representative bodies; they self-identify as indigenous people of Ukraine, as is reflected in their self-ascribed names; both are ethnic minorities within the larger population of Ukraine, and neither has a state formation of its own. Therefore, both groups fully meet the requirements of the relevant Ukrainian legislation and are recognisably deserving within international definitions of indigeneity too.

Additionally, initiating a discussion on granting indigenous status to the Servur'a and Krym'a may draw attention to the pressing problems of other Romani groups, and the Roma in Ukraine in general, and provide the impetus to formulate and implement appropriate legislation to guide state policy towards the Roma. Preserving a distinct Romani cultural identity, which may manifest itself in upholding language, traditions, spiritual values, among other values, customs and practices. Such state support could truly help develop these communities, as well as other territorial communities, wherever they may reside. In fact, given the characteristics of the Krym'a and the Servur'a, the existing clauses of the Act "On Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine" can already become the basis for the state's policy towards these ethnic groups within its territorial boundaries.

Finally, one does need to acknowledge the objection that the inclusion of Servur'a and Krym'a on the list of indigenous peoples of Ukraine may invoke new threats. It may, for instance, affect the situation of other Romani sub-ethnic groups in Ukraine, who also need additional attention from Ukrainian state and society, or whether the granting of this status could negatively affect the Servur'a and the Krym'a currently residing in the territory of the aggressor state (the Russian Federation)

[25] Others argue that at least the Crimean Karaites are descendants of Turkic peoples and their religion is based on ancient Turkic beliefs, having only an indirect connection with Judaism (Tyahlyy 2007; Vodotyka & Savenok 2011).

and Ukrainian territories temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation. However, the moral case is clear, and, we hope, clearly argued here. It is always the right time to do the right thing, and given the exigent existential threat to many from these groups that emanates from ongoing Russian aggression, war-crimes and crimes against humanity, the Krym'a and the Servur'a deserve to hear in clear terms that all of Ukraine stands in solidarity with their indisputable humanity. Such official recognition of their indigenous status, their unassailable belonging both to and within Ukraine, would send such a message.

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# SERVUR'A AND KRYM'A (CRIMEAN ROMA) AS INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF UKRAINE

**Key words:** Ukraine, Krym'a (Crimean Roma), Servur'a, indigenous people, Romani (sub) ethnic groups

The article presents an ethnographic and sociological description of two sub-ethnic groups of Ukrainian Roma: Sérvur'a and Krým'a (Crimean Roma). Based on the field research conducted in 2016–2022, we have concluded that the Krym'a and the Servur'a are (sub-) ethnic groups which meet most of the national and international criteria for being regarded as indigenous people of Ukraine. Servur'a and Krým'a were both formed in the territory of Ukraine, are predominantly based in Ukraine, are bearers of distinctive languages and cultures, have traditional, social, cultural and/or representative bodies, identify as (indigenous) people of Ukraine, as is reflected in their self-names; each of them is an ethnic minority within the population of Ukraine, and neither has a state formation of its own outside of Ukraine. Therefore, they fully satisfy the requirements of the relevant Ukrainian legislation. Additional grounds for classifying Servur'a and Krym'a as indigenous peoples are their non-dominant position in society, their traumatic historical experience, which includes the Holocaust of the Roma, the 1944 deportation of the Crimean peoples, as well as their vulnerability to forced displacement from their historic lands and the fact that the Krym'a became refugees and internally displaced persons as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war. In the authors' opinion, the initiation of the discussion on granting indigenous status to the Servur'a and the Krym'a can draw attention to the urgent problems of all Romani ethnic groups in Ukraine and give impetus to the formation of the state's policy towards the Roma.

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