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The myth of Crimea: Crimean narrative in Russian and Ukrainian media

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Thesis written under the supervision of
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Abstract

In 2014, Crimea was annexed from Ukraine by the Russian Federation. Two opposing ways in which Crimean Peninsula, Crimean people and Crimean history are depicted in Russian and Ukrainian media constitute two separate narratives. This work explores the concept of narrative and the construction of the narrative through media. Narrative, often used by political forces to construct or reclaim meaning and thus influence the general public, is looked at through the prism of framing theory. Packages within established frames are tested based on their structure and viability. The connection between the narrative and identity, memory and state ideology is being explored, and the comparison of Russian and Ukrainian narratives as two competing mediums is being established.

Abstrakt

W 2014 roku Krym został zaanektowany od Ukrainy przez Federację Rosyjską. Dwa przeciwstawne sposoby przedstawiania Krymu, narodu krymskiego i historii Krymu w mediach rosyjskich i ukraińskich stanowią dwie odrębne narracje. Ta praca bada koncepcję narracji i konstruowania narracji za pomocą mediów. Narracja, często wykorzystywana przez siły polityczne do konstruowania lub odzyskiwania znaczenia, a tym samym wpływania na opinię publiczną, jest postrzegana przez pryzmat *framing theory*. *'Packages'* w ustalonych *'frames'* są testowane pod kątem ich struktury i żywotności. Badany jest związek między narracją a tożsamością, pamięcią a ideologią państwową oraz ustalane jest porównanie narracji rosyjskiej i ukraińskiej jako dwóch konkurujących ze sobą mediów.

Introduction

If one decides to learn about various regions of Russia and Ukraine, their history and cultural significance and chooses to do so through the media, two places will undoubtedly emerge to capture one's imagination. Both enjoy the most important geographic location, being the key to the Black Sea and Azov sea alike. Both have very rich history, having witnessed multiple civilisations prosper and decline, erect fortresses and temples, build mind-boggling cave towns and ships, some of which are still being discovered on the bottom of the Black sea. One of these places is the "Southern Paradise" of the Russian Empire, a place of Russian military glory, home to the Russian naval fleet, a place where, according to the Russian president Vladimir Putin, "everything speaks to our [Russian] history and pride"[1]. A glorious symbol for everything that Russia and hundreds of years of imperial heritage would like to represent, it was recently reunited with its motherland after an unquestionably democratic referendum.

The other place is the autonomous region of Ukraine, an integral part of the country for more than 60 years, a home to more than 147 nationalities including *qirimli*, the native population that has lived there for hundreds of years, long before the first Russian annexation. This region captures the essence of the diverse and culturally accepting Ukraine that has finally made a choice to embrace its Western heritage and become European not only in geographic

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[1] Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation", President of Russia Website, 18 March 2014, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603, accessed 16.05.2021

location, but in values and culture. "The heart"[2] of the country according to the Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky, it is deeply interconnected with Ukraine not only in history but through its very land and water, fully depending on mainland Ukraine in all key supplies. Recently it was annexed by the Russian Federation after a military intervention and a bogus referendum held for and still unrecognized by the international community. The annexation of this region marked the beginning of a devastating military aggression of Russian Federation against Ukraine.

However, there is a tricky part about both of the regions described above: they are the same place. The name of the place is Crimea, and the two descriptions of it provided above showcase how diametrically opposite Russia and Ukraine construct it to be. Two myths, two different stories of the same events and two attempts at constructing and controlling the meaning, Russian and Ukrainian narratives of Crimea come from the shared historical memory and mutual post-imperial and post-socialist heritage, with two countries choosing to apply and reimagine the common heritage according to their own ideologies, goals and agenda of today. In this thesis, I would like to explore the two narratives of the same place: the post-2014 Russian and Ukrainian narratives of Crimea.

From the beginning of 2014, the topic of Crimea has been the key point of an ongoing information war between the two countries, the one that introduced the world to the multitude of techniques in the arsenal of the Russian propaganda machine. The Russian government denies its presence in Donbas with the same passion and dedication it uses to boast about the 'historic' choice that the people of Crimea have allegedly made. To justify this 'choice' even more, it has created an elaborate narrative of Crimea: a construction of great depth and multitude of

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[2] Volodymyr Zelensky, "Zelensky about Crimea: 7 years ago we had our heart ripped from our chest", Ukrain'ska Pravda, 26 February 2021, available at
https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2021/02/26/7284807/, accessed 15.05.2021

meanings, appealing to the most persistent and important identity-building national myths, such as the baptism of the Rus' and the World War II, called 'The Great Patriotic War' in Russia. Recently, this official narrative has been cemented in the Russian legal field by the new constitutional amendments: now even questioning the legality of Crimea entering the Russian Federation is punishable with massive fines and possible prison term under the new Russian law on "Territorial integrity"[3].

The official position of Ukraine has taken a different approach: it frames Crimea and the events surrounding it in accordance with international law, which openly calls what happened in 2014 an annexation. After the events of the Euromaidan, also known as 'the Revolution of Dignity', Ukraine seems to have finally committed to a new, pro-European pattern of development, which, in the light of the past relations between Russia and Ukraine, sometimes described as post-colonial, means going directly against the neo-imperial, 'metropolitan discourse' of Russia (Wilson 2015). Not only did the new, post-Maidan Ukraine have to confront a multi-layered, increasingly anti-Ukrainian narrative of the Putin's Russia; Ukraine also found itself tracing a narration line between decolonisation and reconstruction of an imaginary pre-colonial reality, a rarely avoidable postcolonial trap of replacing old imperial myths with the new national mythology (Wilson 2015).

Not only the topic and mutual heritage binds the narratives together: it is also the competing nature of both. While legal reasons prevent both narratives from having any actual opposition within each country, they go on to become competitors for each other, with each narrative often evolving not by itself, but as a response to its competitor. Wherever Russian and Ukrainian narratives clash

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[3] 'Kak novyj zakon zaŝitit territorial'nuû celostnost' Rossii' *(How the new law is going to protect the territorial indegrity of Russia)*, Official website of the State Duma, available at http://duma.gov.ru/news/49146/, accessed 15.07.2021

in themes and frames, Crimean discourse emerges: the question of Crimea, an answer to which differs depending on the narrative lens through which one might look at it. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that among the main Russo-Ukrainian battlegrounds for constructed meanings, Crimean narrative is one of great — if not greatest — importance. The events of 2014 marked the beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine both through the information warfare and the real-life military intervention, with narratives surrounding Crimea helping to justify Russian actions.

In this research I will be looking at Russian and Ukrainian media sources in order to discuss why exactly this is the case, what exactly is Crimean narrative of the years following the 2014 annexation, and which patterns within Russian and Ukrainian national storytelling make Crimean tale so vital for both. The research consists of five chapters. Chapter one is dedicated to the methodology of the research; chapters two and three explore the connection between narrative, identity and ideology. It also discusses the media structure in the two countries in order to explain the connection between the media narrative and the state. Chapters four and five deal with media samples and discuss the most common themes that constitute the two narratives, and the Conclusion summarizes the key discoveries and observations of the dissertation.

Chapter 1. Methodology

Key concept: narrative

This research will be dedicated to the qualitative media analysis of Russian and Ukrainian hegemonic narratives surrounding Crimea through the means of

framing and securitization theories. Both Russian and Ukrainian narratives will be conceptualized as "hegemonic" or "counter-hegemonic", with main *frames* – thematic structures that help to justify the inner logic of a narrative – and *packages* – the tools used to construct and maintain the viability of the frame – explored through the prism of the securitization theory that analyses narrative tools in accordance with the security considerations.

In order to understand the logic behind the case selection, it is necessary to outline the importance of the narrative first. The debates surrounding the very concept of narrative and its application in political science have been especially active at the turn of the century (for instance, see Patterson and Monroe, 1998; Bates, 1998; Griffin, 1993; Bevir, 2006; Lynch, 2005). However, while the scholars were debating, the political actors were actively implementing narratives as tools at their disposal in order to achieve their own goals (Bacon 2012). Recently, the importance of narrative has finally been acknowledged, with researchers now concentrating on the narratives themselves, as well as the correlation between narrative and state policy (Subotić 2013). It is getting significantly more difficult to deny the importance of narrative in the age of the social media and 24-hour news cycle: it could be argued that the narrative is gradually turning into the very fabric of the information field we exist in.

Any narrative is, essentially, a story, but not every story becomes history. To know someone's story is to understand, explain or even predict their actions more precisely (Somers 1994, p. 61). On a larger scale, to control the narrative more often than not means to own the past, and the struggle to own the past is rooted in the multiple ways in which memory affects the present: David Thelen argues that "the struggle for possession and interpretation of memory is rooted in the conflict and interplay among social, political, and cultural interests and values in the present" (Thelen 1989).

Subsequently, winning the battle for the past means creating a very strong claim for the present, with collective memory and public opinion at one's disposal.

Every issue that becomes a topic of public discourse has a culture and history of constructed meaning; thus, working with any narrative is, essentially, exploring various ways and mediums through which the meaning can be constructed (Gamson and Modigliani 1989), who is the main target of this construct and what is the purpose for the construction (Trahar 2009). Fundamentally, narrative analysis aims to study the story itself (Kohler Riessman 1993).

Therefore, it could be argued that understanding the inner logic behind any narrative means discovering the way or ways in which the narrative is constructed, which could reveal the key motivations of its designers and leads to a better grasp of how the narrative affects reality. Although this might seem far reaching at first, the topic in question is one of the examples where narrative sometimes becomes indistinguishable from reality, with two key players having a fierce competition for which version of reality prevails. These are only some of the factors that contributed to my selecting Crimean narratives as the main topic of this research.

Case selection and timeframe

In order to even begin to describe the importance and intricate complexity of Crimean narratives, I believe it is integral to answer three key questions first: *what* is Crimea, *which* Crimea, and *why* Crimea. After all, it is only one out of many contested territories — places, political status of which is disputed by different countries — with palpable Russian presence. Despite being occupied by the Russian Federation in February-March of 2014, it is still far from being the most tormented region of Ukraine, with the war in Donbas entering its eighth bloody year at the time of this writing. What makes Crimea so unique when there are just as well-developed, borderline mythological cultural narratives

surrounding, for instance, invasion of the Caucasus by the Russian Empire[4]? How come Crimea is 'the heart' of Ukraine when September 2021 will mark the first school year for the first generation of Ukrainian kids who were born after the Russian annexation of Crimea, and thus most likely will never set foot on the contested peninsula? In other words, what makes Crimea special, and this case — worthy of attention?

In order to better answer these questions, I will be looking at the most impartial source at our disposal: academic research surrounding Crimea. There is a vast body of literature dedicated to understanding the situation in Crimea, some of it written prior, and most of it after the events of 2014 which I will also be using in later chapters in order to define Crimea independently from Russia and Ukraine, apart from the artificially constructed narratives meant to redefine the region in accordance to their goals and agenda, and to gain a better understanding of the region itself.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and inclusion of Crimea into the newly proclaimed independent Ukraine, the expectations of conflict similar to Nagorno-Karabakh or Chechnya were expressed by some, mainly due to the complex ethnic map of the region, with 147 nationalities trying to peacefully co-exist within the borders of one small peninsula. There was also a shadow of the Soviet past looming over the region, with memories of Crimean Tatars, the indigenous population of Crimea, getting deported in 1944 and essentially replaced by the predominantly Slavic population from Russia and Ukraine, with Russian-identifying population constituting a substantial majority at the time of the Soviet collapse. However, it was the fact that the conflict did not occur that drew most attention to Crimea. In fact, Gwendolyn Sasse in her 2007 book 'The Crimea Question: Identity, Transition and Conflict' defines 'the Crimea Question'

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[4] For instance, "What to read and watch about the Caucasian War?" (Chto chitat' i smotret' o Kavkazskoi vojne?), Arzamas, available at https://arzamas.academy/materials/1535, accessed 01.06.2021

itself as *'how did this [avoiding the conflict] happen?'* (Sasse 2007, p. 3). Same goes for other researchers, such as Liam Anderson: while discussing ethnic federalism as a possible solution for regions with problems caused by ethnic division, he calls Crimea a place where 'federacy has arguably been an effective solution to ethnic conflict' (Anderson 2013, p. 227).

In fact, so much attention has been drawn to the situation in Crimea itself and the possibility of conflict from within the peninsula that almost no actual consideration was given to two actors surrounding it: Ukraine and Russia. Ever since the 2014 annexation of Crimean peninsula from Ukraine by the Russian Federation, the dispute surrounding Crimea — Crimea question, Crimean issue, the myth of Crimea — has re-emerged for the first time since the mid-1990s (Charron 2016), with two countries competing not only for the land or natural resources, but for the right to stand on the "right side of history" by creating the narrative that justifies and elevates their political interests in Crimea by building historical, cultural and moral context around it. "Tell me whose Crimea is, and I will tell you who you are"[5] are not just lyrics from a popular song: it is not only political sympathies that one's stances on Crimea showcase, but an affiliation with one of the two narratives, positioned within the larger frame of each country's political agenda and national ideology.

On one hand, there is post-Soviet Russia's quest for rediscovering its own sense of national identity and self outside of the empire, which resulted in the formation of the new nationalistic ideology called *'Russkiy mir'* (The Russian world). Within this narrative, Crimea is not only one of the 'side-chapels' of the Russian temple (Prokhanov 2014): it could be considered the key to it. This powerful neo-imperial Russian narrative of Crimea, fuelled by hundreds of years of national myth-building, is best manifested in the 2014 address of Vladimir

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[5] Undervud, 2015, full lyrics available at https://goodsongs.com.ua/song149235_undervud_krym.html, accessed 14.05.2021

Putin: 'Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride'[6]. On the other hand, there is the freshly emerging national narrative of the New Ukraine (Wilson 2015, p. 353), simultaneously dealing with responding to Russian aggression, reclaiming and redefining its own post-Soviet heritage (Dyczok 2015-2016) and building the new one, self-identified as European and grounded in a 'developing sense of civic nationalism' (Charron 2016, p. 236), where multi-ethnic Crimea with more than 147 nations living on the same peninsula should be the key component. Ironically, Ukrainian national idea of today is being shaped in many ways because of the Russian actions in 2014 that helped to solidify Ukrainian civic identity by creating a national idea worth fighting for (Wilson 2015), with regaining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and refusal to follow in the steps of Moscow as key components.[7]

All this combined makes Crimean narrative of Russia and Ukraine a great case study of constructed meaning: it perfectly aligns with the timeframe of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, appeals to common memory and heritage, and presents a pressing political and legal issue. In issues as controversial, intense and politically charged as Crimea, the attempts at constructing opposing meanings are showcased better than anywhere else, with interpretations of historical events and memory having huge impact on justification of present-day conflict through elevating one nation at the expense of another, bizarre approach to the national interests, and rhetoric apologetic of violence (Mendeloff 2008).

Furthermore, the significance of Russian and Ukrainian narratives of Crimea is amplified by the fact that there is no 'third opinion' on Crimea outside of Russian and Ukrainian narratives presented in the media: from 2014 and

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[6] Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation", President of Russia Website, 18 March 2014, available at http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603, accessed 16.06.2021

[7] Official website of The Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, "Peace Means Full Restoration of Territorial Integrity of Ukraine and Moscow's Undeniable Recognition of Our Right to Walk Our Own Path", 29 January 2019, available at https://gur.gov.ua/en/content/myr-tse-povne-vidnovlennia-terytorialnoi-tsilisnosti-ukrainy-i-bezzaperechne-vyznannia-moskvoiu-nashoho-prava-ity-svoim-shliakhom.html, accessed '25.04.2021

onward entering Crimea for foreign reporters is either impossible, or illegal[8]. Therefore, any take on Crimean situation after 2014 in any foreign media will have to rely on either Russian or Ukrainian sources, and will thus be shaped entirely by the officially endorsed Ukrainian or Russian narratives of Crimea, at least partially shaped in accordance with the political agenda of each side. This only emphasises the importance of the 2014 through present day timeframe of this research, even further amplified by the very nature of any public discourse: it changes and evolves with the course of time, which is a point of great interest for this research. This is why I will be looking at the evolution of Crimean discourse in Russian and Ukrainian media starting from the year 2014 (the year of the annexation and the beginning of the conflict).

Research question and method

The main question that this research is aiming to ask goes as follows:

- *What has been the evolution of the post-2014 Crimean narrative in Russian and Ukrainian media?*

The somewhat broad nature of the question can be explained by the goal of the narrative and discourse analysis: to analyse the story. It is important to note that this research does not aim to trace the connection between the public opinion and media discourse; the main goal here is to explore the narratives, their evolution, competing nature and the ways in which both narratives affect each

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[8] Costa-Kostricky, V. What does it take for a journalist to enter Crimea? Index on censorship, available at https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2018/05/what-does-it-take-for-a-journalist-to-enter-crimea/, accessed 08.06.2021

other. In order to answer the research question, I will be looking at Russian and Ukrainian media as the main source of information.

Crimean dispute, fuelled by mutual animosity and amplified by the abundance of new, previously non-existent means to construct and influence the narrative, could be illustrated by various examples of public discourse. With non-state actors, such as the church and various non-governmental organizations playing an increasing part in the new age of warfare (Mulford 2016), the key role in shaping and delivering narratives is, however, still largely in the hands of the media, with the 24-hour news cycles, Internet and social networks now reaching audiences on a scale previously unimaginable. Although there are various means through which public discourse is carried out, media platforms remain one of the most important ones for narrative and discourse analysis.

In discourse analysis, mainstream media is often seen as the cultural entrepreneur, drawing from, reflecting on and contributing to the creation of the narrative surrounding the issue (Gamson & Modigliani 1989, p. 3). It is true for the case in question: the role of the cultural entrepreneur, introducing audiences to the frames of the narrative and playing a part in normalizing them as 'common sense' is hard to exaggerate. The decision to build this research off the media data comes from this unique role that the media plays within and for the narrative. However, there is a key difference that sets issues such as Crimea apart from any other and forces us to draw our data from both media and official governmental sources alike: it is the matter of conflicting legal positions according to Russian and Ukrainian law.

It is important to keep in mind that although the Crimean question has both cultural and historical significance, it remains a largely political issue, which explains why the Crimean discourse in both countries has actively emerged only in 2014: prior to 2014 there was no Crimean question as we know it (*Whose is Crimea?*) to be asked (and this statement can be seen reflected in various political and media sources, with the most prominent one being the 2013 speech by

Vladimir Putin himself[9]). The re-emergence of the Crimea question is the result of the 2014 annexation, and the legality of the question is one of the key definitions of the Crimean narrative. As the following chapters will show, both Russian and Ukrainian narratives surrounding Crimea are extremely one-sided (which will allow us to define them as 'hegemonic narratives'), with no possibility for a second opinion. The main reason for this is in legislation: it is illegal to question territorial unity of the Russian Federation (be it in suggesting that Crimea is annexed, or that the 2014 "referendum" was undemocratic) according to the Constitutional amendments of 2020[10], and it is just as illegal to suggest that Crimea is anything but Ukraine in accordance with the First article of the Ukrainian Constitution[11].

According to some researchers, media are "a site on which various social groups, institutions, and ideologies struggle over the definition and construction of social reality" (Gurevitch and Levy 1985, p. 19). However, it changes dramatically in the case of such sensitive and politically charged topics like Crimea, where one political narrative is looming over the media discourse, backed up by legislation and all the potential punitive measures at its disposal. As an example, even research like this one would be deemed highly questionable at best and illegal at worst if conducted in either Russia or Ukraine. Thus, it is absolutely impossible to talk about Crimean narrative in Russian and Ukrainian media without mentioning the political narrative surrounding it in both countries. Understanding both narratives will contribute to a more detailed comprehension of framing mechanisms used in discourse construction, and will help us establish

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[9] *'Putin: Rossija ne budet «mahat' shashkoj» v Krymu'* (Putin: Russia won't be 'waving a saber' in Crimea), December 19th 2013, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OMt649FQyhA, accessed 13.06.2021

[10] *Gosudarstvennaia duma Federal'nogo Sobraniia Rossijskoi federacii, Vneseny popravki po realizacii polozhenij Konstitucii o zashhite territorial'noj celostnosti* (State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Amendments to implement the constitutional regulations on protecting the territorial integrity are implemented) , available at http://duma.gov.ru/news/49011/, accessed 08.06.2021

[11] See also: The Constitution of Ukraine, Part X, "Autonomous Republic of Crimea", available at https://rm.coe.int/constitution-of-ukraine/168071f58b, accessed 08.06.2021

some of the common themes prevalent when touching upon the topic of Crimea. This, in its turn, explains the usage of the more official sources, such as speeches, statements and articles written by the power-holding officials of both countries as supplementary sources meant to establish the key patterns within the narratives.

This qualitative analysis will be taking a constructionist approach to critical discourse analysis and will be based on framing theory and interpretive packages (Gamson & Modigliani 1987; 1989), as well as securitization theory for analysing the Russian and Ukrainian media framing Crimea as a tool for pursuing their own national interests (Gaufman 2015).

I **conceptualize** both Russian and Ukrainian narratives as so-called 'hegemonic narratives' — powerful narratives that are rarely questioned by society (Subotić 2013). These narratives attempt to construct 'common sense' by marginalizing other narratives (Krebs and Lobasz 2007) and reinterpreting the past in order to situate it within the present (Andrews 2003). Common origins and themes within both narratives will be traced in order to showcase the closely interconnected nature of both. The competing nature of the packages will be discussed in relation to the political narratives of both countries, and the key development patterns will be traced in order to establish how the narratives affect each other.

Understanding of the Russian and Ukrainian narratives as *competing* comes from the following. It is expected when conducting discourse analysis, and, more specifically, looking at frames and packages within those frames, to encounter a theme and a countertheme, competing packages, sponsored by different political and economic forces: "On most policy issues, there are competing packages available in this culture" (Gamson & Modigliani 1989, p. 2). However, with this research I aim to show that this is not the case for the topic in question. I theorize that the competition over which point of view will prevail and the following evolution and transformation of packages does not happen in each individual narrative but rather in response to each other. Thus, we will see that

whenever there is a counterpoint or a competing point of view missing from the narrative due to the artificial limitations set by censorship, it will likely emerge in the competing narrative.

The best tool to operationalize the narratives by tracing and analysing the common and opposing themes in the media and establishing the inner logic of each narrative is by using *framing theory. Framing* can be defined as a central organizing idea of a narrative (Gamson & Modigliani 1987), and each frame consists of *packages*: interpretive devices used to give meaning to an issue (Gamson and Modigliani 1989).

In order to work with packages that constitute Russian and Ukrainian media discourse on Crimea I will follow Gamson & Modigliani's model of establishing packages through combination of direct quotations and paraphrasing, with the main criteria here being whether or not the package is officially embraced by the advocating side, which could be observed through the language used in official speeches, public addresses or other means of communication with the public (Gamson and Modigliani 1989).

In order to better illustrate the method that I will be implementing, I would like to showcase it with the following. For example, let's take a look at the piece from the Russian 'Channel One News' from March 2014 that talks about Crimean Referendum and what predetermined the 'Russian choice' of Crimean people:

For the overwhelming general population [of Crimea], the choice they made on March 16 was dictated not by a pragmatic approach, but by a spiritual impulse. People who live on the peninsula are of different nationalities, but everyone considers themselves to be a part of the Russian people.

The tricolor [of the Russian flag] is like the Victory banner.[12]

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[12] Channel First, *Krym w ozhidanii peremen* (Crimea anticipating the changes), 18 March 2014, available at https://www.1tv.ru/news/2014-03-18/46148-krym_v_ozhidanii_peremen, accessed 24.06.2021

Here, two packages become instantly apparent: the one we can label 'spiritual' — it is meant to appeal directly to the ideology of the 'Russian world' (the one that defines the Russian hegemonic narrative and that will be further explored in the following chapters) — the idea of an unspoken, almost intuitive Russianness that unites all Russians all over the world, and the other one, 'the Great Patriotic' package that refers to the collective Russian memory surrounding the Soviet win in the Second World War (Great Patriotic War according to the Russian narrative) and that represents one of the most important identity-building blocks of present day Russia (Gaufman 2015), the one that is closely interlinked with positioning Russia as a winner of the war against the Nazism and a liberator of Europe (Zhurzhenko 2007).

After establishing the packages, we have to answer: are they effective? In order to be plausible, coherent and fit within not only Crimean narrative of Russia, but the broader discourse of Ukrainian-Russian Crimea, it has to provide the meanings that are consistent with the frame (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). For instance, in order to work, 'the Great patriotic' package has to deal with the historical reality of Russia being one of the many victors of WWII; Ukraine being a member of the winning side as a member of the USSR at the time of the war; finally, the Nazis being defeated and not possessing an active threat to the Russian people in the year 2014. The package deals with it by appealing to another vital package within the 'Russian world frame': the one of 'fascist Ukraine'. Another thing that defines an effective package according to Gamson and Modigliani is its durability: an ability to construct meaning over time, incorporating new events into their interpretive frames — in a way, to follow a scenario. This will be showcased in this research by drawing comparison between the years of narrative development and showing how the packages adjust to the changing political climate.

Since the official narratives of both sides are the key concepts of the research, this analysis will focus on the national media discourse with some of the relevant material on the topic of Crimea during the 2014 through 2021 time period that I sample. However, considering the nature of the discourse, some of the official sources will be taken into account as well. This is justified by the close interconnection of media- and political narrative, with legal limitations as the main reasoning behind it. The sources used for analysis of the Russian media narrative include two categories: the mainstream media, represented by the likes of RT (Russia Today) and Channel One Russia (former ORT), with their ratings and reach of audience being the main justification for the selection. The second category, usually perceived as a more liberal one, will be represented by two outlets: Novaya Gazeta and Ekho Moskvy. The main goal here is two establish whether or not the Russian narrative of Crimea differs depending on the type of media in question. The official stances on Crimea used as a guiding frame for the analysis will be taken from the speeches and addresses of Vladimir Putin. For analysing Ukrainian narrative, the main goal is to receive a selection of material as inclusive as possible, considering a much greater variety of Ukrainian media with different ownership of each outlet or media group often affecting the narrative, as well as a much more extensive freedom that the Ukrainian media enjoys. I will be looking at sources such as Ukraiinska Pravda, Krym.Realii, Channel 5 and the most compelling source on Crimean Tatar narrative in Ukraine, ATR.ua. As for the official sources, the websites of the president of Ukraine, Ministry of Foreign affairs of Ukraine, Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine etc. Key words using when conducting the search on the websites of media outlets and official sources are: Крым, Крим (Krym, Crimea), with a timeframe specified in the Search bar of each website individually.

It is important to point out that these sources are not used with an expectation that all of them are equally available to the general public and affect the public discourse on a similar scale; this research does not aim to measure the

relationship between the narrative and general audience. The sample is meant to provide an indicator of the issue culture. Due to the nature of the analysis (qualitative and interpretative), as well as the limitations set by the original languages of the source material (Russian and Ukrainian) the translation of the text and division into frames, packages and their respective breakdown will be conducted manually.

Limitations

As with any other research topic, there are certain limitations that this work has unavoidably encountered. First, there is the ***issue of translation*** and potential changes in meaning that might occur. All the Russian-English and Ukrainian-English translations for the research will be executed personally by the author unless specified otherwise. Having an experience in written and oral translation from Russian and Ukrainian into English and being a native speaker of both, I am committed to minimizing distortions of original text; however, this possibility still exists.

Second, there is a possibility of ***personal bias***. As a born and raised Crimean, I find expression of certain biases when it comes to the situation as personal as the annexation of Crimea unavoidable. However, I am dedicated to limiting my emotional output, which has also led to a decision to use neither my own anecdotal experience in this research, nor the one of my family.

Chapter 2. Theoretic background

The myth of Crimea

South of the Ukrainian region of Kherson, surrounded by Black and Azov seas, there is a peninsula that used to be known as Taurica: Herodotus mentions it in his work[13], Euripides — in 'Iphigenia in Tauris'[14]. With the majority of its key cities beginning as Greek colonies, it would subsequently become a part of the Roman and then later Byzantine Empires, see the rule of Scythians, Sarmatians, Goths, Huns, Khazars — as well as Venetians and Genovese. Brief presence of Kievan Rus' — marked, nevertheless, by the baptism of prince Vladimir the First into the Orthodox church in the Byzantine town of Chersonesus — was soon swept away by the Golden Horde, which soon met its demise and was replaced by the Crimean Khanate.

In 1783, this territory became a part of the Russian Empire, then, after several unsuccessful attempts at independence, it first joined the Soviet Union and then was included into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and several tumultuous years it became a part of the independent Ukraine, only to be annexed by the Russian Federation in 2014. It is currently considered to be the economic 'grey area', with sanctions implemented by the international community refusing to recognize the annexation. Furthermore, Reporters Without Borders states that the annexed Crimea has become a 'black hole' from which little information emerges[15]. Hundreds of years of different civilizations, rulers, prosperity and chaos later, this piece of land is

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[13] See "The history of Herodotus, Book IV", URL: http://classics.mit.edu/Herodotus/history.4.iv.html, and "The histories", Book 4, chapter 103, section 1, available at https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0126%3Abook%3D4%3Achapter%3D103%3Asection%3D1, accessed 01.04.2021

[14] "Thy voice commanded me to speed my course to this wild coast of Tauris…", Euripides, "Iphigenia in Tauris", available at http://classics.mit.edu/Euripides/iph_taur.html, accessed 01.04.2021

[15] Reporters Wihout Boerders, Russia, available at https://rsf.org/en/russia, accessed 22.07.2021

once again in turmoil, having become one of the most pressing geopolitical issues overnight. However, the fight for Crimea is not physical this time: it is the battle of two opposing narratives competing for the right to own and define it in accordance with their own goals and ideologies.

As every issue that becomes a part of public discourse, Crimea question has culture and history that mirrors the real history of the actual Crimean Peninsula with minor differences in definitions. To understand the latter means getting significantly closer to figuring out the former: exploring the cultural matrix of the region helps better understand the process behind the emergence of rival claims and competing frames that they create (Sasse 2007, p. 35). However, it is important to keep in mind that not every event in Crimean history, spanning over millennia, matters in the context of Crimean narratives of Russia and Ukraine. These narratives are interconnected with the identity-building processes within the two countries: Russian narrative tends to emphasize Crimean role as a 'cradle' of Russian civilization and Crimea as a 'pawn in a grand geopolitical game played by Russia against the West' (Suslov 2014, Hopf 2016, as quoted in Nedozhogina 2019, p. 5). Ukrainian narrative places Crimea and its native population, Crimean Tatars, at the center of a newly constructed civic Ukrainian identity, with multiculturalism and inclusivity at its core (Charron 2016). Two mythologized approaches to Crimea of both countries vary accordingly, as Andrew Wilson writes in his "Ukrainians: an unexpected nation":

"To the Ukrainians it was the Cossacks' outlet to the sea; to the Russians it was the jewel in the crown of empire and a site of military glory – or at least glorious defeat, the most emotive symbol in all of the former Soviet territory that Moscow lost in 1991. To the Crimean Tatars, it is their historical homeland." *(Wilson 2002, p. 151)*

One full chapter of Gwendolyn Sasse's book is fully dedicated to the imagined Crimea and the way existing Crimean cultural matrix serves as a foundation for symbol- and myth building (Sasse 2007); however, she puts an emphasis on the role it plays within the region itself rather than on the ways in which it can be exploited by competing political narratives of Russia and Ukraine. She does, however, point out that conflicts have a tendency to emerge where competing claims for territory, ethnicity and identity exist (Sasse 2007, p. 35). Sasse's take on Crimean question in 2007 goes in accordance with the geopolitical realities of the day: she wonders how the territory with so much potential for conflict managed to avoid one (Sasse 2007, p. 3). What predetermined said potential?

First and foremost, there was the case of the native population of Crimea — Crimean Tatars, deported *en masse* from Crimea to Central Asia in 1944 for alleged collaboration with Nazi Germany. Emptied Crimea was repopulated with predominantly Slavic families from Russia and Ukraine, which cemented what many of the surviving Crimean Tatars (about 46% never made it to Central Asia due to the terrible conditions of transportation) already believed to be true of the exile: genocide and ethnic cleansing (Campana 2008). With the Soviet Union on the verge of collapse, many Crimean Tatars began returning home, only to be faced with severe discrimination and harassment from the Slavic population of Crimea, who were threatened by the arrival of 'the others', as well as for their own property, with entire neighborhoods that were previously Crimean Tatar now being populated with Slavs (Uehling 2004, as quoted in Charron 2016). Danger of ethnic-based conflict between Crimean Tatars and Slavic population was looming over the region all the way through the nineties and early two thousand; however, it never occurred.

Secondly, another danger, more palpable at times, could potentially come from the Russian population of Crimea. The alleged danger of Russian-

identifying individuals who remained in the post-Soviet republics other than Russia after the collapse of the USSR has been discussed in a great body of research of the 1990s. Such claims, rooted in the belief of a strong sense of Russian ethnolinguistic belonging and inability to put up with nationalistic measures imposed by the non-Russian republics (Kulyk 2017), did not take into account two important factors. First, there was no strong sense of Russian identity after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the first decade after the fall was characterized by the Russian soul-searching and identity-building in attempts to redefine itself outside of the empire (more on the Russian identity building in the 'Quest for Russian identity' segment). Second, a large-scale assimilation of the ethnic Russians into the majority groups within the post-Soviet republics was predominantly ignored (Kulyk 2017, p. 241). Indeed, the danger of the Russian population within foreign countries would only emerge later, together with a narrative hostile towards the titular core: a narrative provided by an external force and meant to justify neo-imperialist ambitions of the Russian Federation. That was not, however, the case throughout most of the nineties, with Russia being too busy with its domestic politics.

Despite the possibility of Russian population assimilating into the titular core, Crimean case proves to be something of an exception. According to the map depicting gradual growth in the number of schools with Ukrainian as the main language, by the year 2012 almost 100% of schools in most of the Western Ukraine used Ukrainian as the main language of instruction; the numbers for Donbas are nearing 50%[16]. This shows a peculiar heterogeneity within Russian-speaking part of Ukraine, and further proves what Kulyk called a loss of distinct Russian ethno-cultural identity (Kulyk 2017, p. 2) by some regions, namely Donbas. However, the situation varies drastically when it comes to Crimea: only

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[16] Statistics available at http://statistika.in.ua/mova2001/ukrainska_v_shkolah, accessed 27 April 2021.

8% of Crimean schools used Ukrainian as the main language of instruction by the year 2012[17]. Kulyk mentions that the Donbasites were more likely to associate themselves with their home region, while Crimeans, on the contrary, leaned to ethnic, Russian self-perception (Kulyk 2017, p. 5). However, I choose to agree with Charron, who argues that this view diminishes the importance of Crimean regional identity. His own 2011 survey suggests that the most powerful element of the Crimean self-identification was the feeling of regional identity: a sense of belonging to Crimea itself (Charron 2016, pp. 240-241). This could be seen as the main reason for no ethnic conflict occurring during twenty years of Crimea as an uncontested part of independent Ukraine: Russian language and Soviet nostalgia aside, the key identification of Crimean people has always been with Crimea first. It could also be argued, however, that it was this exact sentiment, deepened by the autonomous status of Crimea and Ukrainian government's passive attitude towards identity building (more on that in the 'Ukrainian identity: before the storm' segment) that, on one hand, further impeded the spread of Ukrainian identity, while on the other simultaneously contributed to the strengthening of Russian influence in Crimea, with two Russian centers in Simferopol and Sevastopol promoting Russian language and culture as integral parts of Crimean identity[18].

Although Crimean identity and regional self-identification could be perceived as a promising topic, it is the larger-scale narratives that define, reshape and reimagine Crimea for the world to see. Ever since the events of 2014 (with the definition of the events being among many meanings contested by the two narratives — for one side, it is an 'occupation' or 'annexation', for another — 'reuniting'), Crimea has become 'a black hole', according to the definition of the

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[17] Same as above

[18] Official website of the 'Russian Cultural Center' showcases the key Russian identity-building activities of the center in the years prior to the annexation: literary readings, celebration of Russian cultural figures and Russian holidays, sponsorship of the Russian-speaking youth etc, available at http://www.ruscultura.info/, accessed 07.06.2021

Reporters Without Borders organization: it is a place from which zero unbiased information emerges, a grey area fully controlled by artificially created meanings. To explore those meanings is to navigate whatever it is that is left from Crimea, and exploring the themes and meanings implies studying the narratives that create and guide them. This will be achieved through media analysis of frames and packages that shape Russian and Ukrainian narratives surrounding Crimea.

Framing and securitization theory

It is important to keep in mind that narrative, in its essence, is nothing more than a story: it is based on meanings that people attribute to their own experiences (Josselson 2006). With this in mind, it comes as no surprise that narrative presents a field of fierce political competition where the one in charge of narrative often simultaneously becomes in charges of both identity and memory, considering how closely intertwined the three are. Therefore, in case of issues as charged as Crimea question, it becomes a story that *states* tell (Subotić 2013) in order to pursue their own political goals. With narrative analysis aiming to discover how, for whom and for what purpose the story is constructed (Trahar 2013), it becomes an interpretation of an interpretation: a take on how different actors perceive, reclaim and redefine the past. ***Framing theory*** was created for the exact purpose of in-depth understanding of any public discourse, with narrative analysis as a part of it.

Framing is a process meant to develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or revise the way the public perceives said issue (Chong & Druckman 2007; Gitlin 1980). This tool is being widely applied in all categories of public discourse and narrative analysis, with divisive, politically charged topics such as Crimea being a primary example: the way Crimea question is being answered directly depends on the lens, or frame, through which we are looking at it.

Within each frame, there are *packages*: interpretive devices used to give meaning to an issue (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). An internal structure of any package is defined by, firstly, the frame in which it exists: if a package is a set of means and tools, then the frame is an idea, the inner logic according to which these tools are functioning. Secondly, any package consists of a variety of framing devices — symbols that offer a somewhat of a shortcut to the deeper meaning within the frame: Gamson & Modigliani differentiate between the framing devices that suggest how the audience should think about an issue (metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, visual images), and the reasoning devices that advocate for the measures that should be taken (roots, consequences, appeal to principles) (Gamson & Modigliani 1989; the more detailed approach to this model can be found in Gamson & Lasch 1981).

Upon defining frames and packages throughout the narrative, I will then be applying **securitization theory** in order to establish what goals the discovered frames are trying to achieve. Securitization theory has been developed as a tool that helps to understand how the security and narrative surrounding it is being constructed (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998). Although it is predominantly used to analyze narratives of the democratic regimes, Elizaveta Gaufman argues that it can be equally applied to the hybrid and authoritarian regimes on the premise of the same basic mechanisms (Gaufman 2015, with reference to Vuori 2008). Both Russian and Ukrainian framing of Crimea can be seen as a 'securitizing move': an attempt to create such narrative that would portray the other side of the discourse as a threat, which would, in its turn, enable the legitimization of the most drastic measures aimed at battling it (Gaufman 2015). What adds to the securitization element is two different approaches guiding it: Suslov mentions how Ukraine is being turned from 'the heart and cradle of 'Russian civilization' into the 'villain': a comically anti-Russian entity, which also happens to be inhuman, or even satanic due to its betrayal and refusal to be

considered a part of 'the Russian World' (Suslov 2014). According to the similar pattern of 'violence and the sacred' Crimea within this narrative changes into the 'mimetic desire' (Girard 1972, p. 217): it is geopolitically desired because the (imaginary) West and anti-human, fascist Ukraine desire it as well (Suslov 2014).

It is difficult to evaluate how successful the securitization attempts are, especially when analyzing two different countries and two opposing narratives. However, in this research I am not aiming to evaluate how successful the securitization move is: it will require measuring the levels of support of the public opinion (Balzacq 2005). This research will be more descriptive in nature and concentrate on the ways in which securitization moves are being constructed.

Conclusion

Crimean Peninsula, the Southern region of Ukraine, is a place of rich history and great cultural significance, with more than 147 nationalities coexisting peacefully during the 20 years that it had spent as an uncontested part of Ukraine. The potential for the ethnic conflict in the region, seen as almost inevitable by many during the stage of early post-Soviet collapse, characterized by political and economic instability, never came to life; nevertheless, with the beginning of the Russian occupation Crimea became one of the main platforms of 'information warfare' between Ukraine and Russia, with two national narratives, representative of ideologies and political goals of each side, fighting for the right to control the overarching discourse on Crimea. With historical facts re-imagined and identities contested, two narratives revolve around the mythologies of mutual post-imperial and post-Soviet heritage, with identity construction and geopolitical goals fueling their motivations. The following research aims at deconstructing Russian and Ukrainian Crimean narratives by applying framing and securitization theories to the narratives and key structures within the two.

Chapter 2. Russia after collapse: memory, identity and 'the Russian world'

It is impossible to touch upon the topic of narrative without mentioning two other related themes: the one of memory and the one of identity. To understand the construction of the Russian narrative means to also learn about various mechanisms behind it: how the post-Soviet Russian identity was constructed and transformed over time, and how this transformation paralleled the creation of an ideology fundamental for justification of the military aggression by the means of media propaganda.

Only nine years divides two statements by two Russian presidents: a former Russian president Boris Yeltsin's Address to American Congress in 1992 and the current Russian president Vladimir Putin's speech at the First Worldwide Congress of the Russian Compatriots in 2001. However, the real divide between the two is fundamental. In the former, Yeltsin speaks of the fear-inducing communist idol which had finally collapsed forever, and shall never be resurrected on the Russian soil[19]. In the latter, Vladimir Putin for the first time recognizes the concept and program of the "Russian world consolidation"[20] which would not only bring back the communist (and various other) idols of the imperial Russian past to life, but also reshape the entire post-Soviet landscape by the means of war, occupation and propaganda.

In order to understand this dramatic shift from an attempted liberalization to the present day neo-imperialist hegemonic narrative of the Russian state and

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[19] YeltsinCentr, 'Vystuplenie Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federacii B.N.El'cina na sovmestnom zasedanii palat Kongressa SShA o perspektivah razvitija sotrudnichestva mezhdu Rossiej i SShA', available at https://yeltsin.ru/archive/audio/8995/, accessed 11.05.2021
[20] Putin, V., 2001. 'Vystuplenie Prezidenta Rossii Vladimira Putina na Pervom Vsemirnom kongresse sootechestvennikov', available at https://vksrs.com/publications/vystuplenie-prezidenta-rossii-vladimira-/, accessed 11.05.2021

the mainstream media that supports it, we have to define the concept and program that guides it. In the following chapter, I would like to discuss the structure of the Russian media and outline the concept of 'the Russian world' *(Russkiy mir)* and argue that it serves as the main ideological basis for the hegemonic Russian media narrative on a variety of topics, including Crimea.

Quest for Russian identity

The question of any national narrative is directly linked to collective memory and identity. The annexation of Crimea and the narrative attempting to justify it are closely tied with fundamental shifts in Russian identity: as Suslov puts it, 'the reshuffling of the mental landscape of the Russians' (Suslov 2014). The reshuffling, however, has begun with the collapse of the Soviet Union: it caused the most tremendous shift in the identity of the Russian people, who had to rapidly go from being Soviet to being Russian, without necessarily understanding what being Russian actually entails. Collapse of the USSR left Russia without the empire (be it Soviet or Orthodox) for the first time in history.

One of the main characteristics that set the Russian Empire apart from its Western counterparts was the expansionary nature of Russian colonialism: it physically extended the actual borders onto the lands adjacent to the empire (Moore, as cited in Buckler 2009, p. 255). Not only could this be used to explain why Russian identity is sometimes perceived by the Russian writers and scholars as a unique creation that emerged on the border of two worlds, but also to demonstrate how the Russians tend to perceive previously conquered territories not as 'the other', but as an extension of their own self. This is what the interchangeable use of words *russkiy* (of Russian ethnicity or heritage) and *rossiiskii* (of Russian state) since the end of the 19th century (Wilson 2015) could be partially attributed to as well: as one of the means of Russification, as well as cultural appropriation.

The issue of overarching Russianness (*russkost'*), in its turn, was only amplified by the Soviet identity construction mechanisms. Despite the seemingly strong emphasis put on the nationality, with it being inscribed in passports and promoted as one of the defining characteristics of the Soviet citizen, it remained secondary part of the dual Soviet identity used as a political tool, with the motto 'national in form, socialist in content' being the key to its understanding (Bassin & Kelly 2012). It is also necessary to keep in mind that the Soviet state was not built as a Russian-nation state, despite the special status of Russian people within the USSR and Russian being the *lingua franca* of the country (Brubaker 1994). These factors can partially explain why the Soviet nostalgia is more prevalent among the Russians when compared to the citizens of other post-Soviet countries: for the Russians, membership in the USSR did not equal the loss of national sovereignty (Kuzio 2006). On the contrary, there was an added value of Soviet territories perceived as Russian, with Russian ethnic presence and Russian language used at the official level. According to some researchers, even after the Soviet era was over, "identification with the former state entity remained strong among much of the Russian populace" (Kolsto 2000, p. 203).

The issue was seemingly moved to the background during the aftermath of the collapse in the nineties: the economic crisis, terrible levels of crime and overall sense of instability of the nineties made people 'more worried about saving Russia itself rather than saving the world' (Marsh 2007, p. 562). First years of the newly independent Russia are characterized by the re-discovering of Russian identity, joined by the sense of liberation. With the fall of the Soviet Regime, the concept of 'nationality' had re-emerged in the consciousness of the Russian population, combined with a sense of rejection of the Soviet ideology and unwillingness to be associated with the state that had effectively suppressed their sense of national identity, if not denied them in the very possibility of having said identity (Bassin & Kelly 2012). However, the key question remained: what

will happen if Russia struggles with identity even when the dust of collapse settles?

Consolidation of the Russian identity under president Vladimir Putin saw several key elements being implemented on an official level as a part of new national mythology. First, there was the idea of 'the Great Patriotic War'. Among many Russian historical myths and memories, the memory of the World War II is unique: it positions Russian national identity at the center of European fight and win against 'fascism' (a Soviet trope meant to describe the Nazi regime), directly connecting the WWII victory to the 'geopolitical triumph' (Zhurzhenko 2007). The unusual response to the Great Patriotic War narrative from the masses could be explained by the decades of the ideological labor conducted by the Soviet propagandists (Gaufman 2015): for instance, the Victory Day, initially omitted, was proclaimed the national holiday and underwent following sacralization during Brezhnev era, with huge celebrations and military parades organized all over Russia every year (Gudkov 2005). Another explanation could be found in the unprecedented scale of the war: carried out on the Soviet territory, it is arguably one of a very few matters capable of uniting the majority of Russians (Gudkov 2005), and thus actively used as an identity building tool starting from the nineties.

Second, there is the role of the Russian Orthodox Church. Initial attempts at religious pluralism of the Yeltsin era failed at providing a solid ideological support for the national identity in crisis (Lamoreaux and Flake 2018). The long history of Russian church and state working alongside proved to be mutually beneficial in the past, with the state providing a legislation needed for the church to establish itself as the key religious institution, and the church providing the state with a moral high ground and 'divine' justifications. History has once again repeated itself with 'spiritual renewal' mentioned in the National Security Concept, alongside other government policies, in 2000, with critics rightfully stating that Putin seemingly had planned to cover his regime up with a kind of

'Orthodox nationalism' (Blitt 2011, p. 457). The constant support of the church has gradually become an integral component of the Russian foreign politics and its 'hybrid warfare', with greater and greater emphasis being put on the importance of 'non-state actors' during the events of 2014 (Mulford 2016). Perhaps it should come as no surprise that the regular meetings between the Church's Department of External Church Relations and Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinated the initiative of 'the Russkiy Mir': the originally-soft-power tool meant to reestablish Russian influence abroad (Blitt, 2011, p. 383, as quoted in Lamoreaux and Flake, 2018, p. 2).

Understanding "the Russian world" ideology

When it comes to defining the Russian state, as well as the Russian national narrative, various sources use different definitions. In 2016, Vladimir Putin for the first time announced 'patriotism' as the new Russian national idea[21]. However, it is definitions such as 'autocratic state' (Mulford 2016), 'authoritarian nation defined by statism with a nationalistic narrative' (Ajir and Vailliant 2018), Putinism (Bacon 2012), 'patriotic and neoconservative' (Hansen 2017) and various others come to mind first, all undeniably having a lot in common, and at the same time somewhat failing to capture the complicated essence of the Russian national ideology. The contradiction between post-imperial and post-Soviet, *russkiy* (of Russian ethnicity) and *rossiiskii* (of Russian state), victimhood and dominance is best captured the ideology known as 'the Russian world' *(Russkiy mir)*, a concept that has been guiding Russian nation- and identity-building at least since the year 2014 (Suslov 2018).

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[21] As quoted in 'Vstrecha s aktivom kluba liderov', available at
http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51263#sel=233:28:Fff,234:46:afX, accessed 20.05.2021

On the official English version of the 'Russkiy Mir' (Russian World) foundation website — a government-sponsored organization created by Vladimir Putin in 2007 — it is specified that the Russian world is 'much more than the territory of the Russian Federation'[22]: it is also *ethnic* Russians, as well as the Russian native speakers living abroad and their families. Russian version of the website, however, goes a little further by claiming that it consists of the people 'united by the feeling of connection to Russia', and elaborates by defining the Russian world as 'the world of Russia'[23]. What started out as a way to define the Russian diaspora living abroad and its relation to the Russian state has gradually turned into the idea of *Russia* presenting a geopolitically larger entity than the *Russian Federation*.

The first official acceptance of the 'Russian world' ideology on the highest level occurred in 2001, with Vladimir Putin's speech at the First Worldwide Congress of the Russian Compatriots (sic!) in which he announced the program of the 'Russian world consolidation'[24]. For the first time the idea of Russia going beyond its borders due to the fact that 'millions of people outside of it speak, think and feel in Russian' received an official recognition from the president of the country. After brushing aside the idea of giving the compatriots legal status and definition, he delves into the spiritual realm, stating that being a compatriot depends on the 'spiritual self-identification' of an individual[25].

The next mention of the concept of Russian 'privileged interests' abroad, especially in relations to Russian citizens in the foreign countries, was made by a then-Russian president Medvedev in the aftermath of the 2008 Georgian war, and caused an understandable shock, most notably among the representatives of the

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[22] Official website of the Russkiy Mir Foundation, 'About Russkiy Mir Foundation', available at http://russkiymir.ru/en/fund/index.php, accessed 21.05.2021

[23] The Russian version of the official website of the Russkiy Mir foundation, 'Fond Russkiy mir', available at https://russkiymir.ru/fund/, accessed 21.05.2021

[24] Putin, V. 2001. Vystuplenie Prezidenta Rossii Vladimira Putina na Pervom Vsemirnom kongresse sootechestvennikov. URL: https://vksrs.com/publications/vystuplenie-prezidenta-rossii-vladimira-/, accessed 11.05.2021

[25] Same as above

post-Soviet states (Trenin 2009). Soon after that, Russian Minister of Foreign affairs Sergei Lavrov in one of his statements would refer to the 'civilizational unity' of the lands that used to be a part of the Soviet Union and Russian Empire[26]. This definition further broadens an already extensive potential sphere for exclusive Russian influence even more: it now consists of all the Russia-tied links situated abroad, be it compatriots (*sootechestvenniki*) — Russian-identifying residents of foreign countries, or anything else that could be labelled as Russian, including historical and cultural heritage. To put it simply, wherever *russkiy* goes, *rossiiski* follows. Hence some of the key self-characteristics of the 'Russian world' ideology: originally diaspora-oriented soft-power tool, it is currently proclaiming a mystic, difficult to define Russianness that goes beyond borders and can essentially affect anyone.

Although giving a valuable insight into the current state of the Russian world, all these definitions can seem somewhat puzzling from the outside, and thus require a more systematic approach. The concept of the 'Russian world' has undergone various changes since the collapse of the Soviet Union; the key point of interest for this research, however, begins with the year 2014: the year when it has expanded into the realm of official ideology (Suslov 2018). In his 2018 article, Mikhail Suslov uses Michael Freeden's reasoning to define the 'Russian world' concept, specifically, the one involving ideology moving beyond only one idea and even encompassing concepts that might seem contested (Michael Freeden, as quoted in Suslov 2018, p. 348). According to this reasoning, Suslov defines the 'Russian world' as not only a geopolitical concept, but rather an ideology that defines both Russian self-identification and its relationship with foreign entities, as well as the Russian geopolitical sphere of influence (Suslov 2018).

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[26] Sergei Lavrov, "Russian Foreign Policy and the New Quality of the Geopolitical Situation," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, December 29, 2008, as quoted in Trenin 2008.

The three stages of the Russian world are defined by Suslov in the following manner. He differentiates between the three stages of the Russian world and relies on a number of criteria to define the stages, among those criteria being timeframe, key intellectuals that influenced the concept, most prominent metaphors, intellectual contribution, ideological concept and relation to the 'sphere of influence' politics (Suslov 2018, p. 346). Stage one followed the initial trauma of the response to the fall of the USSR: it began in 1996 and ended in 2000, and was characterized by the first attempts of defining Russian identity not only within the physical borders of the country, but also through Russian diasporas outside the country. The concept of 'Russian European' was a direct result of these attempts, with the idea of creating such Russian identity that would not contradict European one, and thus will be able to integrate and assimilate in Europe, with Russian diaspora abroad perceived as an entity that should be able to directly affect the Russian state (Komm 2013; Ziolovskaya 2006 as quoted in Suslov 2018).

Stage two of the 'Russian world' (years 2001-2009) is characterized by the first attempt of its consolidation. With Vladimir Putin becoming Russian president and the country taking a sharp turn in its domestic and foreign policy, the ideology of the 'Russian World' received a new life: in 2001, it gains an official recognition. The further deepening alienation between Russia and the West defines the third stage of the 'Russian world' that started around 2009. This stage is characterized by Russian aggression against some of the former Soviet Republics, namely the annexation of Crimea and military aggression in Eastern Ukraine, as well as the Cold-War-like alienation between the Western and Russian worlds. The ideology, openly endorsed by the government and the Russian Orthodox Church, supports divisive narratives of painting the West and Ukraine as non-Orthodox and corrupt: non-Russian by definition (Laruelle 2016; Suslov 2016, as quoted in Lamoreaux and Flake, 2018).

The ideology of the Russian world, originally created as a soft-power tool among attempts to re-establish Russian identity, has undergone three distinct stages, with the third one marking the beginning of an active stage of Russian aggression against former Soviet Republics. The ideology, endorsed by the key government officials, serves as a foundation of the Russian hegemonic narrative on the various topics, including the one of Crimea and Crimean annexation. It is successfully reinforced through the media outlets, most of which happen to be under direct control of the Russian government, which, in its turn, allows for the creation of one narrative surrounding any pressing matter of the day.

Russian media

To understand the narratives that media either creates or perpetuates we must first understand the state of the media itself. Russian media has undergone several stages of development prior to reaching its current state. First, there was the collapse of the Soviet Union followed by oligarchs — a small group of wealthy and well-connected "businessmen" — seizing control over existing media and creating new, fully subservient media outlets (more on the oligarchic media rule in Russia see Zasurskii 1999; 2001). A certain level of pluralism achieved during this era came to its peak during the 1999 election campaign, with different oligarchs and their media outlets supporting different candidates: an unprecedented event in Russian public life that has not been repeated ever since. This stage lasted all the way through the 1990s and finished around the year 2000, with oligarch Boris Berezovskii's successful political campaign throughout his media outlets such as the ORT television channel (currently Channel One Russia) bringing Vladimir Putin to power (Hansen 2017, Dunn 2014).

The second stage, the media reconstruction of the early years of Putinism, is better described by Vladimir Putin himself: during his 2002 Paris press

conference, he talked about the state taking the control over the media back from the oligarchs ("And wherever this would concern the state, the state would try to take something back" - *I tam, gde eto kasalos' gosudarstva, gosudarstvo pytalos' chto-to sebe vernut'*[27]). This stage is characterized not only by the state seizing control over the media directly through buying controlling shares (as, for instance, happened in case of Channel One), but also through the change in ownership which would maintain the illusion of the media outlets remaining in the private sector while at the same time being owned by the individuals and companies closely linked to the state: for instance, Vladimir Gusinskii's MOST group (including NTV channel and the radio station *Ekho Moskvy*) were taken over by Gazprom-Media in 2001 (Shenderovich 2002 and Belin 2002, as referenced in Dunn 2014).

This strategy has gradually led to most of the mainstream media sources being gathered in the hands of either the state or state-affiliated companies, which can be illustrated by the following table:

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[27] President of Russia official website, 'Zajavlenie dlja pressy i otvety na voprosy v hode sovmestnoj press-konferencii s Prezidentom Francii Zhakom Shirakom', available at http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21472, accessed 23.05.2021

TABLE 1

Owner	Television	Radio	Print media	Internet
State	Pervyi kanal (51%) VGTRK: Rossiya-1, Rossiya-2, Rossiia-K RTR-Planeta and others	VGTRK: Radio Rossii Mayak and others	Rossiiskaya gazeta	
Gazprom-Media	NTV NTV-Plyus TNT	Ekho Moskvy and others	Itogi Sem' dnei Tribuna and others	RuTube (www.rutube.ru)
ProfMedia	TV-3 2 x 2 MTV Rossiya	Avtoradio and others		Rambler lenta.ru
Natsional'naya media gruppa	Pervyi kanal (25%) Pyatyi kanal (SPb) REN-TV	Russkaya sluzhba novostei	Izvestiia	
SUP				LiveJournal.com gazeta.ru

Source: James Dunn, Lottizzazione Russian Style: Russian
Two-tier Media System, 2014.

The current state of media in Russia is nothing more than a direct result of the preceding events. Reporters Without Borders — an international non-profit, non-governmental organization that aims to safeguard the right to freedom of information — has recently placed Russia at 150th out of 180 spots in its annual ranking[28]. The situation has remained practically unchanged since the year 2014 when Russia was ranked 148th: it is still characterized as a bad environment for independent journalism, with a stifling atmosphere, draconian laws, leading news outlets being closed down and silenced, and journalists getting harassed [29]. Freedom House — a non-profit non-governmental organization that specializes in research and advocacy on democracy, political freedom, and human rights — offers similar data, with Russia being placed at the number 20 in the 'Not free' category. It is being stated that the Russian government owns 'all of the national

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[28] Reporters Without Borders, Russia, available at https://rsf.org/en/russia, accessed 02.06.2021
[29] Same as above

television networks and many radio and print outlets, as well as most of the media advertising market'[30]. Reporters Without Borders goes on to suggest that 'the major TV channels continue to inundate viewers with propaganda', which subsequently leads to the climate becoming very oppressive for anyone who questions 'the new patriotic and neo-conservative discourse'[31]. Two conclusions can be made from the information provided by the independent sources above: first, that the mainstream media in Russia is either directly owned, or heavily influenced by the government, and second, that a strong pro-government narrative is being ubiquitously adopted by the mainstream media under pressure from the government.

Despite what some might define as one of the symptoms of an authoritarian regime (Shevtsova 2008), there are researchers that suggest otherwise. For instance, Richard Sakwa suggests that the mere existence of a Russian public sphere critical of Putin — something that no true authoritarian regime could possibly allow — speaks of a different nature of the regime (Sakwa 2014, as quoted in Hansen 2017). Among the media outlets that he uses as an example of outlets providing a more critical outlook on Putin and his regimes are *Novaya Gazeta* (newspaper), *TV Dozhd* (television) and *Ekho Moskvy* (radio). Therefore, if we follow this line of thinking, could it potentially be discovered that an overarching narrative embraced by the mainstream media outlets has somehow been avoided by certain independent media channels? What makes this possibility highly unlikely is best highlighted by the two-tier system in which the Russian media have been existing since the period following Putin's first election to the presidency in 2000 and which John Dunn uses the Italian term *lottizzazione* to describe (Hansen 2017, Dunn 2014).

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[30] Freedom House, Russia, available at https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia/freedom-world/2021, accessed 07.06.2021

[31] Reporters Without Borders, Russia, available at https://rsf.org/en/russia, accessed 07.06.2021

Originally defined as 'the sharing out among different political parties of senior posts in publicly-owned organizations on the basis of political expediency' (De Mauro 2000, as quoted in Dunn 2014), *lottizzazione* in the Russian media landscape presents a two-tier system, in which the first tier consists of the media outlets that are firmly and fully controlled by the Kremlin and thus must present the audience with a certain narrative approved by the government. Most of the television channels with national broadcasting, several newspapers (for instance, *Izvestiya and Komsomol'skaya pravda*) and radio stations (*Russkaya sluzhba novostei*) could be put on this list prior to 2014 (according to Hutchings & Rulyova 2009, Levchenko 2007, Shlapentokh 2011, as quoted in Dunn 2014).

The second tier is made up of the outlets that are granted more freedom in their coverage of political events: among the examples are the ones previously mentioned, such as Novaya Gazeta and Ekho Moskvy, and it arguably used to be the case for one television channel, REN TV (Fedotov 2006, Greene 2009, Beumers et al. 2009a, as quoted in Dunn 2014). It is important to point out that, although some of these examples may seem outdated in the light of post-2014 events and the tightening governmental grip over the media, what remained true back in 2009 and still holds up in the present day and age is the definition of Russian media given by Samuel A. Greene: 'In contemporary Russia... the likes of *Novaya gazeta*, *Ekho Moskvy* and scattered publications and broadcasts in other outlets are not sufficient to create a "free media space" distinct from the overall Russian media space — which is decidedly not free' (Greene 2009, as quoted in Dunn 2014).

The *lottizzazione* system showcases that Russian media space is fully controlled by the government and it is merely the level of control that differentiates one tier from another. Since 2014, the level of control over the second tier has been increasing dramatically, most notably — with the introduction of the increasingly more severe amendments to the 'foreign agents'

law followed by a chain of independent media outlets closing down[32] and facing persecutions from the government[33]. The most recent amendments to the law have been a target of repeated criticism, with the Venice Commission at the Council of Europe claiming them to be a serious violation of human rights[34]. Other ways to persecute the tier two media outlets include direct censorship and financial pressure, for instance, by cutting any possible sponsorship or claiming tax irregularities within the media outlet in question. What these draconian measures implemented by the regime, essentially, prove, is that any media outlet based in tier two is still heavily influenced by the government and can be moved to tier one at any given moment (Hansen 2017).

However, the bigger question that we should ask for the purpose of this research is *does the Crimean narrative really differ between the tier one and two media outlets*? The very existence of the two tier system, two information spaces with a thin line between them that could be crossed at any given moment suggests that all media is failing at its most fundamental tasks (providing free and unbiased information to the audience) at best, and actively participating in the formation of a government-guided narrative at worst. In many regards, Crimean example is the perfect case study for the ways in which proper journalistic work is absent from the Russian media space disregarding the tier, with the spread of disinformation, omitting of facts and one-sided reports as prime examples (Hansen 2017).

Indeed, it has been something of a common knowledge that the official position of the mainstream, tier one Russian media on Crimea has remained unchanged since the annexation (the fluctuations within the narrative will be

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[32] RFE/RL's Russian Service, Russian Media Outlet VTimes Closes As 'Foreign Agent' Designation 'Destroys' Business, available at https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-vtimes-closes-foreign-agent/31288206.html, accessed 01.06.2021

[33] Novaya Gazeta, Zhurnalistam DOXA uzhestochili obvinenie po delu o vovlechenii nesovershennoletnih v protest, available at https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2021/06/28/zhurnalistam-doxa-uzhestochili-obvinenie-po-delu-o-vovlechenii-nesovershennoletnikh-v-protesty, accessed 01.06.2021

[34] Todd Prince, Russia's 'Foreign Agent' Amendments 'Seriously Violate' Human Rights: Venice Commission, available at https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-foreign-agents-europe-/31346269.html, accessed 04.07.2021

explored in the following chapters). The influence of the mainstream Russian media is also difficult to refute, with a May 2014 poll showing that 94 percent of Russians were receiving their Crimea-related news from national television, including sources such as Channel One (Hansen 2017, p. 18). Nevertheless, some of the outlets vastly considered to be tier two (for instance, *Novaya Gazeta, Ekho Moskvy*) cover the topic of Crimea in the exact same fashion as their counterparts at *Rossiya 1* and *Channel One*: something that I will attempt to illustrate in Chapter 3.

Conclusion

It is impossible to discuss Russian hegemonic narrative without having a conversation about Russian identity, ideology and state of media first. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly emerged Russian state was left with a demand for its own identity creation for the first time in existence. This caused a number of issues, starting with the post-Soviet nostalgia and finishing with appeals to collective memory of the Russian people through the narrative of Great Patriotic War and religion, represented by close affiliation of the state with the Russian Orthodox Church. The finishing ideology, developed through the nineties and officially established during the early years of Putinism, is called 'the Russian world', and it represents a neo-imperial concept meant to establish Russian sphere of influence abroad (primarily among the post-Soviet countries) through the Russian-identifying 'compatriots' — a status that could be obtained by anyone who sympathizes with Russia and its goals. The Russian two-tier media system, which pre-determines whether a media outlet is being placed under direct or indirect control of the government, creates the perfect environment for the emerging of the national narrative in any given topic, especially the one as politically charged as Crimean.

Chapter 3. Post-Soviet and Post-Russian: Ukraine at the crossroads

Despite the same Soviet roots and similar tendencies at the earliest stages of development, Ukrainian media narrative drastically varies from its Russian counterpart in a lot of key characteristics. With Russia and Ukraine both lacking experience in consolidated statehood and strong feeling of national identification (Wilson 2015), the main difference between the two was in the post-colonial dynamic of ex-metropolis and its adjacent territory that predetermined both the relationship between the countries and the influence of one upon another. Ukrainian Crimean narrative was almost non-existent before 2014 due to the passive state of the government and close relations with Russia, seen by the majority of Ukrainians as a 'fraternal nation' (*bratskii narod*).

This vision of the Russian state and Russian people was not groundless. The Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, under which Ukraine has signed a treaty on the non-proliferation of the nuclear weapons under the assurance of safety and territorial integrity, was supported by the Russian Federation that served as one of the three main guarantors[35]. More than 2 million Ukrainians legally lived and worked in Russia by 2013[36], and Ukraine was home to one of the biggest Russian diasporas in the world, with more than 7 million people identifying as ethnic Russians living across the country according to the 2001 population census[37]. Furthermore, Ukrainian region of Crimea was home to the Black Sea Fleet, with Russia leasing the port of Sevastopol from Ukraine since 1991 (Charron 2016).

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[35] Document available at https://treaties.un.org/Pages/showDetails.aspx?objid=0800000280401fbb, accessed 22.06.2021

[36] According to MPC – Migration Policy Center, document available at https://migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/migration_profiles/Ukraine.pdf, accessed 21.06.2021

[37] According to the 2001 Ukrainian census, available at http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/, accessed 21.06.2021

Ukrainian narrative, repeatedly called 'anti-Russian' by the Russian government and Russian mainstream media in both state and ethnic senses (with two words used to describe it: *anti-rossiiskii,* meaning 'against Russian state', and *rusofobiâ,* hatred of anything Russian), has emerged out of securitization necessity meant to protect the country from a complex, multilayered anti-Ukrainian aggression of a much larger, richer and well-equipped former metropolis (Wilson 2015). The key aspects that defined Ukrainian response lie in the specifics of Ukrainian media structure, its identity-building, amplified by the events of the 2014, and tools within the Ukrainian Crimea narrative that are either unavailable to or ignored by the Russian side, such as Ukrainian support and partial adoption of the Crimean Tatar narrative that allowed to incorporate it into the claim of the newly emerging Ukrainian civic identity (Charron 2016). This chapter will deal with all of the aspects mentioned above in an attempt to establish the key characteristics of the Ukrainian state, Ukrainian identity and the narrative that has paradoxically emerged under the circumstances of war, economic crisis and annexation of one of its key regions.

Ukrainian media

Despite plummeting levels of trust, the media still holds a great deal of power over Ukrainian society. Upon being asked "where do you learn about history outside school?" 61.4% of Ukrainian respondents answered with "from media and films"[38]. Despite that, Dyczok states that the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union in Ukraine showcase that constructed meaning and media narratives did not necessarily work when contradicting underlying value systems held by individuals (Dyczok 2015, p. 432). This remained true in the years following the collapse mostly due to the general laissez-faire attitude

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[38] Survey conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology on 12-21 September 2014, as quoted in Dyczok 2015

expressed by the government when it came to the matters of Ukrainian identity-building (more on this topic in the following segments dedicated to Ukrainian identity).

On one hand, this approach significantly slowed down identity consolidation by surrendering Ukrainian public sphere to the influence of Russian language and Russian cultural space; on the other, it allowed a certain degree of variety among media. with media outlets creating their own narratives rather than promoting one of the state. Media privatization of the early Leonid Kuchma's presidency (mid-1990s) left most of the media outlets in private hands, which, despite the purchasers often pursuing political and business-related interests of their own through the media, had an effect similar to the one in the mid-90s Russia: diversification of opinions and a certain level of pluralism, even during periods of greater political censorship, such as presidencies of Kuchma and Yanukovych (Hansen 2017; Dyczok 2015).

The key division within pre-2014 Ukrainian media for a very long time was, quite symbolically, the one of language: the state's laissez-faire approach cemented the status quo that predetermined coexistence of Russian and Ukrainian languages in the media space and clear dominance of the former (Kulyk 2013). The dominance of Russian language in Ukrainian media was imposed by close cultural and political proximity to the Russian Federation, with Russian media products entering Ukrainian media market with no obstacles. This was predetermined by a certain fondness of Ukrainian consumers, able to understand both languages, as well as somewhat disingenuous measures implicated by various media outlets after the Orange Revolution: for instance, broadcasting in Russian with barely visible Ukrainian subtitles allowed the media product to pass as bilingual or even Ukrainian.

Unlike Russia, Ukrainian media did not undergo the 'collectivization' process of early 2000s, with key media outlets being bought either by the governmental structures or companies directly linked to the government: most of

the media remained in the hands of different oligarchs, with the most recent developments showcased in the table below:

Company/group	Key media outlets	Owner	Share of Viewing
1+1 Media	1+1 national television channel; 1+1 International, UNIAN, Ukraine Today television channels	Igor Kolomoisky, oligarch	1+1 TV channel: 10,87% TET – 3,01% 2+2 – 2,99%
Media Group Ukraine	Channel Ukraine, Segodnia newspaper and affiliated website	Rinat Akhmetov, oligarch, ex-associate of Viktor Yanukovych	Channel Ukraine: 10,80%
StarLight Media	STB, ICTV, Novy Kanal tv channels	Viktor Pinchuk, oligarch, relative of Leonid Kuchma	ICTV – 10,10% STB – 7,78% Novy Kanal – 7, 27%
Inter Media Group	Inter national television channel; K1, K2, NTN, Enter Fil'm tv channels; Podrobnosti.ua, "Ukraïns'kì novyny" un.ua,	Dmytro Firtash, oligarch, international criminal; Serhiy Lyovochkin, politician, ex-associate of Viktor Yanukovych	Inter – 7, 35% K1 – 2,86% NTN – 2,69%
UMH Group	Forbes, Korrespondent magazines; Komsomol'ska Pravda v Ukraïnì, Argumenty I Fakty newspapers; 'Avtoradio', 'Nashe Radio', 'Europa plus', 'Retro FM' radio stations	Serhiy Kurchenko, businessman, international criminal (corporate and intellectual rights seized by the court decision of 2017)	

Table based on: The Insider, Ìnformacìâ - zbroâ: komu naležat' ukraïns'kì ZMÌ[39], , Top channels Ukraine[40]

Other important media outlets include: Ukraïns′ka Pravda newspaper (owned by Olena Pritula; the outlet is closely linked to Russian oligarch Kostântin Grigorišin), Gromads′ke telebačennâ (owned by a group of journalists), Radìo

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[39] 'Informaciya - zbroya: komu nalezhat" ukrayins"ki ZMI', available at http://www.theinsider.ua/infographics/2014/2015_smi/vlasnyky.html accessed 01.06.2021
[40] Top Ukrainian channels in July, 2021 (Age 18-54, cities 50+), available at http://tampanel.com.ua/en/rubrics/canals/, accessed 01.06.2021

Svoboda Ukraïna, including Krym.Realii: a resource dedicated to Crimea specifically (owned by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, funded by the US Congress), Ukrinform (state-owned information agency), Channel 5 (television channel owned by the former president of Ukraine, oligarch Petro Poroshenko), Channel 24 (owned by the family of the Andriy Sadovyi, mayor of Lviv)[41].

As the table is meant to showcase, Ukrainian media sphere is characterized by diversity, which predetermines development of different narratives, frames and packages, guided by the sponsorship and affiliation of particular outlets (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). Contrasting to Russia, Ukraine does not have one well-established narrative prevalent in the media: it is attempting to create one. Current Ukrainian public sphere consists of various different narratives, with people expressing their affiliation to one or the other based on their own identification rather than trust in media, which remains at its lowest (Szostek 2018). Moreover, the presence of the government in the media sphere seems to be rather limited at first glance, with only a couple of outlets (the likes of *Pershyi Channel, Ukrinform*) being owned by the state.

However, the presence of the state in Ukrainian media narratives after 2014 is much more palpable than it used to be: it is signified by the refusal to continue along the lines of the passive laissez-faire attitude towards identity-building. This is best exemplified via Ukrainian legislation: prior to 2014, there was only one piece of legislation meant to influence the media-framing of a historical, identity-related issue: the law adopted during the Viktor Yushchenko's presidency made it illegal to deny Holodomor, the 1930s genocide of Ukrainian people by the Soviet government[42]. The events of 2014 changed this precedent: for instance, "The Law of Ukraine on the condemnation of the Communist and National-Socialist (Nazi) totalitarian regimes in Ukraine and prohibition of propaganda of

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[41] 'Informaciya - zbroya: komu nalezhat" ukrayins"ki ZMI', available at http://www.theinsider.ua/infographics/2014/2015_smi/vlasnyky.html, accessed 01.06.2021

[42] Law of Ukraine no. 376-V, About Holodomor 1932-33 in Ukraine (Zakon Ukrainy No. 376-V Pro Holodomor 1032-33 rokiv v Ukraïni, as quoted in Dyczok 2015.

their symbols"[43], a part of the decommunization measures taken in Ukraine post-2014, directly prohibits any rhetoric that could be seen as apologetic of the Soviet Union of the Third Reich and their crimes. Legislation regarding Crimea and Donbas is also very clear in its definitions of the two as regions of Ukraine, with subsequent reflection of these laws in the media narrative.

Nevertheless, the Ukrainian media coverage remains relatively independent from the government and the situation seems to have drastically improved from the events of 2014, with Reporters Without Borders placing Ukraine at 97th position in its rating (in 2014 Ukraine took 127th spot out of 180) and stating that the post-2014 reforms have overall improved the media situation in Ukraine despite the seemingly fragile state of the changes[44]. 'Information warfare' (although it should be clarified that said warfare is being carried out in attempts to defend itself from Russia) is listed among the key problems of Ukrainian public media sphere, as a follow-up to an issue of oligarchs' media monopoly illustrated in the table above. Freedom House gives Ukraine a 2 out of 4 in relation to the existence of free and independent media, with a comment similar to that of Reporters Without Borders, mentioning the influence of 'business magnates' and the so-called censorship of media outlets based in Russian Federation[45].

Nevertheless, it can be argued that Ukrainian media landscape is more diverse and presents a more complex scene than the Russian one, with the official ideology providing a set of legal limitations for the key frames within the narrative, but leaving more leeway for the packages within the frames. This further supports our claim of Ukrainian narrative presenting a competing counter-hegemonic alternative to its Russian counterpart.

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[43] Pro zasudžennâ komunìstičnogo ta nacìonal-socìalìstičnogo (nacists'kogo) totalìtarnih režimìv v Ukraïnì ta zaboronu propagandi ïhn'oï simvolìki, available at https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/317-19#Text, accessed 01.05.2021

[44] Reporters Without Borders, Ukraine, available at https://rsf.org/en/ukraine, accessed 02.06.2021

[45] Freedom House, Ukraine, available at https://freedomhouse.org/country/ukraine/freedom-world/2021, accessed 02.06.2021

Ukrainian identity: before the storm

There is a profound historical background to justify both ethnic and civic components of modern Ukrainian identity. Ukrainian history, although indisputably built around the common idea of gaining independence and sovereignty, is a history of a divided land, different parts of which used to belong to different empires and thus found themselves taking paths significantly different from one another throughout the history (Wilson 2015). The search for Ukrainian identity was naturally predestined to become a complicated one, for it demanded to define what constituted being Ukrainian outside of its former metropolises, and whether the Ukrainian should be based on civic or 'peripheral' (ethnic) criteria, such as ethnicity, language and religion (Kulyk 2016, p. 591). Nevertheless, the foundation of the Ukrainian independence and the potential for the future statehood were undeniable, with the year 1991 being the most telling instance: this is when the majority of Ukrainians voted for independence despite having lived through the decades of Soviet nation- and identity-building propaganda, with narratives of the unquestionable Soviet unity rejected by the majority of the population (Dyczok 2015). However, despite things looking optimistic at the start, the Soviet identity persisted in some parts of Ukraine, and underwent a dramatic shift into the direction of Russian identity in the others.

One of the reasons for the complications in the field of ethnic identity-building lies in the infamous laissez-faire attitude held by the government towards promotion of Ukrainian identity at the early stages of state-building (Dyczok 2015): this can be illustrated by lack of effort to promote Ukrainian language, with Russian remaining the only language of instruction at school in regions such as Crimea, and dominance of Russian language on all the major television channels. This attitude could be observed in other spheres of Ukrainian life as well: for instance, there is Ukrainian pre-2014 foreign policy, for a long time

fluctuating between Russia and the West (Wilson 2015). The other reason can be seen in Russia itself actively intervening in Ukrainian inner affairs under the pretense of protecting the rights of the fellow compatriots or promoting Russian language and culture (in line with 'the Russian World' ideology): for instance, under this pretense two Russian cultural centers were opened in Crimea during the early 2000s[46].

The ethnic aspect of Ukrainian identity and its possible consolidation proved to be complicated in the past due to the differences between the two parts of Ukraine: the West and the East, with the Dnipro river traditionally chosen as the border between the two. Various studies (Shulman 1999, 2004; Hrytsak 2007; Sereda 2007) of the identity topic demonstrate that East Ukrainian, or, as Shulman calls it, East Slavic (Shulman 2002), identity had significant differences to the West, or 'Ethnic' Ukrainian identity — most notably, in terms of cultural, historical and linguistic narratives, where sometimes two identities would directly oppose each other (with the question of Russian-Ukrainian relations being the most divisive one in the past).

Alarming undertones of mutual exclusion shown by what some called 'two capitals' of the 'opposite' regions, Lviv in the West, and Donetsk in the East of Ukraine (Shulman 1999, 2004), culminated during the events of the 2004 presidential campaign and the following 'Orange Revolution', when, paradoxically, both the attempts at creating the ethno-linguistic division and eliminating it by deepening further consolidation of a nation were undertaken by two competing sides: Viktor Yanukovych and Viktor Yushchenko respectively. It is not by accident that this was the first time when the divide between the two parts of Ukraine was used as a political tool: it was also then when the division into two opposing factions was consolidated in the media and thus came to existence on a national scale.

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[46]Otkrytie novogo zdaniâ Russkogo kul'turnogo centra, 21 November 2008, available at http://www.ruscultura.info/cms/index.php?go=Pages&in=view&id=98, accessed 16.06.2021

The presidential campaign of Viktor Yanukovych, a candidate vastly regarded as a pro-Russian one, successfully used preexisting ethno-linguistic divide within the country in order to capitalize on, if not artificially create, the differences between the two parts of Ukraine, as well as to portray his opponents as hostile towards the East and South of Ukraine (Wolczuk 2007). Interestingly enough, some argue that it was during that time when Russia used its 'information warfare' machine in Ukraine for the first time in order to support Yanukovych (Johnsson & Seely 2015) and thus spread the divide even further. Among various examples of the election campaign propaganda meant to target the ethno-linguistic division within the country, maps of Ukraine depicting the country divided into three 'castes' of people, 1st, 2nd and 3rd class (Western, Central and South-Eastern parts respectively) were spread, and the comparison of the opposing candidate, Viktor Yushchenko, and his Western-Ukrainian supporters to the Nazis was used as a successful dehumanization tool[47].

The results of the political campaign proved to be extremely powerful: they showed that the ethno-linguistic divide within the country had now significantly increased. A graph on the official website illustrates the most tremendous difference between the West and South-East, with Yanukovych winning all the predominantly Russian (or Russian-speaking) regions of Ukraine (including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk regions, with slightly more than 81, 93 and 91 percent of votes respectively). Two of 'the most Ukrainian' regions, Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil, proved to be the least successful for Yanukovych, with 2.8 and 2.7% of the voters showing him their support[48].

Unsurprisingly, most of the measures taken in the aftermath by the Yushchenko's government in order to promote a united Ukrainian identity were

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[47] Based on materials of the 2004 presidential campaign of Viktor Yanukovych, available at https://frankensstein.livejournal.com/176967.html, accessed 22.05.2021
[48] Results of the elections available at https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vp2004/wp0011, accessed 20.06.2021

met with the resistance from the Russian-speaking population, and were largely considered to be a threat, mostly due to the ethnic understanding of Ukrainian identity that they promoted and a pronounced sense of exclusivity that came from it (Shekhovtsov 2013). Kulyk has argued that Yushchenko and his government were seeking to build an all-encompassing identity with strong emphasis on Ukrainian ethno-cultural aspect, which made it potentially problematic for the culturally different Russian-speaking population (Kulyk 2016, p. 593). Kulyk, however, denies the notion of clear-cut boundaries between the Russian and Ukrainian population: instead, he points out that it is the lack of a more defined division that contributed to stagnation of the Russian-speaking population, with most people in Ukraine using Russian language in everyday life or mixing both disregarding of the region where they live or ethnic identity. According to him, such disparity has occurred because of the actions taken by the Soviet government in an attempt to sustain both locally Ukrainian identification of the Ukrainian people while cultivating the sense of belonging to the Russian language as the 'main' one, the universal tool of connection between the citizens of the Soviet Union (Kulyk 2017, pp. 19-20).

This apathetic attitude of many Ukrainians was among the main reasons for the impediment of identity-constructing in pre-2014 Ukraine, as mentioned by Andrew Wilson in his 2002 article on Ukrainian identity. There he pointed out the complications within the Ukrainian identity formation project: an amorphous society that was still lacking key elements needed to form a sense of a strong national self, be it national identity or nationalism (Wilson 2002). By 2002, more than a decade after the independence of Ukraine had finally been achieved, Ukraine still could not obtain neither ethnic, nor civic identity. Division within the country, amplified by the weak governance and meek attempts at identity building, prevented formation of a strong ethnic identity, and civic identity lacked both cultural core and a transcendent national idea in order to become viable (Wilson 2002, pp. 31-32). In 2002, it was impossible to predict that it would take

two revolutions, one war and one annexation for the Ukrainian identity to finally emerge, but it happened, at last: paradoxically enough, in 2014, under direct assistance of the Russian Federation and its president Vladimir Putin (Wilson 2015).

Ukraine, reborn

Although Ukraine officially gained its independence and first consolidated statehood after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, it could be argued that the first real attempt at independence occurred significantly later: in 2014. The events of Maidan (also known as the Revolution of Dignity), the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of war in Donbas both triggered partition from the 'Russian World' and accelerated cultural reset. It has been pointed out that the events of 2014 and the Crimean annexation in particular provoked three massive shifts in Ukrainian identity: a rise in patriotism, end of pro-Russian support inside the country, and even further distancing from Russia (Kuzio 2015). In his attempt to define the foundation of post-2014 Ukrainian identity Kulyk concludes that the divide between the Russian and Ukrainian speaking population is more political than ethnic or linguistic, with Russian speakers maintaining loyalty to Ukraine as a nation despite using Russian language in everyday life (Kulyk 2014). In a way, the war and annexation managed something that could not be achieved by the peaceful Orange Revolution and following attempts at identity-building conducted by Viktor Yushchenko: they awoke a sense of nationalism within the previously Russian-identifying population of Ukraine.

The key to the new Ukraine was in the construction of the civic identity, made possible by the events of 2014: the ethno-linguistic, historic and cultural divide lost its significance in the face of a bigger, almost existential threat.

Unpleasant awakening of the 'Russian world' has underlined the key political difference between Ukraine and Russia, cleverly pointed out by Andrew Wilson: 'the difference between an imperfect Ukrainian democracy and authoritarian Russia's sudden recidivist imperial spasm was clear enough' (Wilson 2015, p. 353). The newly established patriotic narrative with 'revolution of values' at its core, uniting every Ukrainian sympathetic to the causes of independence, resistance and nation-building, did not discriminate based on ethnicity or religion, with Ukrainian nationalism aiming to become the direct opposite of its portrayal by the competing Russian narrative: more open-minded and tolerant, with liberal, so-called 'Western' values at its core. This definition of Ukrainian nationalism and the newly emerging civic construction of Ukrainian identity is what made the inclusion of Crimean Tatar narrative into a larger Ukrainian frame possible.

Charron (based on Sasse's 2001 article discussing the situation in Ukraine and Crimea prior to 2014) argues that Crimea and specifically the native population of the peninsula, *qirimli*, more commonly known as Crimean Tatars, play the key part in the formation of a new national discourse, framing Ukraine as 'the state of regions', including all ethnic, linguistic and regional differences without discrimination (Sasse 2001, as quoted in Charron 2016). Such framing of Crimea allows to additionally emphasize the diverse, multicultural basis of the Ukrainian state that goes in line with the new developments within Ukrainian nationalism and civic identity (Kulyk 2014), as well as to use the Crimean Tatar narrative as an additional justification for Ukrainian claim of Crimea. One of the examples of the ways in which Crimean Tatar narrative is being incorporated into Ukrainian is the 2016 Eurovision contest performance by a Crimean Tatar-Ukrainian singer Jamala: a performance both commemorating the traumatic 1944

deportation of Crimean Tatars and drawing parallels between it and the events of the 2014[49].

Although imperfect, a Ukrainian civic identity has begun to emerge, with the events of 'the Revolution of Dignity' (Maidan, Euromaidan) uniting various groups of population previously divided because of ethnic differences. An emphasis on multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural aspects of Ukrainian society is currently being made by the state and the media in an attempt to create both an overarching Ukrainian identity and a national narrative that will be more inclusive and accepting and thus able to fit into the 'Western' definition of a modern nation state.

Conclusion

The fall of the USSR left Ukraine with a consolidated independent state for the first time in history. Nevertheless, the formation of Ukrainian identity did not happen overnight, with an amorphic state of both government and the society, conflicting ethnic identities and lack of solid foundation for the civic identity-building among obstacles faced by the country. The Euromaidan, also called 'The Revolution of Dignity', and other events of 2014 — namely, the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of war in the Donbas — have become decisive in the beginning of construction of the Ukrainian civic identity, with a new form of a more inclusive nationalism at its core. The multiethnic, diverse aspect of the new Ukrainian civic identity is further highlighted by the inclusion of the Crimean Tatar narrative as a part of a larger Ukrainian frame.

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[49] The Guardian, 'Eurovision 2016: Ukraine's Jamala wins with politically charged 1944', available at https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/may/14/ukraine-wins-eurovision-jamala-1944, accessed 07.06.2021

Chapter 4. "Crimea is ours!": exploring the Russian hegemonic narrative

Justification of an event as massive and unprecedented for modern Russian history as the annexation of Crimea takes a lot of 'ideological labor in renaming, rethinking, and re-feeling' (Suslov 2014, p. 588). The 'Potemkin referendum' (Charron 2016) used to manufacture a legal pretense for the annexation is followed by a complex process that involves reshaping of both identity and memory. This process essentially represents creation of a national narrative surrounding one particular topic, in this case — the topic of Crimea. Suslov goes on to suggest three main directions of the Russian narrative surrounding Crimea: through a) historical and military significance, b) sacralization, and c) geopolitization of the region (Suslov 2014, p. 588). For the purpose of this research, I will be using these definitions as three key frames of Russian narrative surrounding Crimea. I will also explore the most frequent packages within the frames and discuss how the packages adapt and adjust in the timeframe following the annexation.

Both conveniently and symbolically, all three frames can be found within the address of Vladimir Putin given on March 18th of 2014. This address meant to both celebrate and justify the annexation of Crimea in the eyes of the world has also become one of the first official justifications of Russian actions in Crimea: a reappropriation statement of a newly acquired territory (Suslov 2014). This statement also serves as a prime example of how the 'Russian world' ideology can be used in the narrative construction: it exploits the idea of 'Russian compatriots' forced to live abroad, glorifies Russian imperial past and appeals to the Russian collective memory of the key identity-building events, such as the World War II. To a certain extent, it also sets the precedent for the media: themes,

frames and packages present in this address will be seen throughout the years of media narrative of Crimea.

Key frames and packages

The first frame, the ***historical and military significance*** of Crimea, uses the military history of the peninsula (and most notably the city of Sevastopol) in order to appeal to the collective Russian memory of past military actions taken in Crimea, most notably — the battles of the World War II, or, as the Russian narrative calls it, the Great Patriotic War. As it was discussed earlier, the emotionally charged and deeply cherished topic of the Great Patriotic War — the result of decades of ideological construction from the Soviet and Russian officials alike — is at the core of the post-Soviet Russian identity (Gaufman 2015). In his 2014 address, Vladimir Putin appeals to it in the following way:

'Krym – eto Sevastopol', gorod-legenda, gorod velikoi sud'by, gorod-krepost' i Rodina russkogo chernomorskogo voennogo flota. Krym – eto Balaklava i Kerch', Malakhov kurgan i Sapun-gora. Kazhdoe iz etikh mest svi͡ato dli͡a nas, ėto simvoly russkoi voinskoi slavy i nevidannoi doblesti.'

'This [Crimea] is also Sevastopol – a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia's Black Sea Fleet. Crimea is Balaklava and Kerch, Malakhov Kurgan and Sapun Ridge. Each one of these places is dear to our hearts, symbolising Russian military glory and outstanding valour.'[50]

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[50] 'Address by President of the Russian Federation', 18 March 2014, official translation as available at http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603, accessed 01.01.21

All of the geographic locations mentioned by Putin appeal to a number of cultural and historical associations shared by most Russians. The significance of Sevastopol when evoking patriotic memories of WWII is immense: base to the Black Sea Fleet, it is one of the twelve Soviet 'Hero cities' (one of two Crimean cities to be honored with the title, alongside Kerch), awarded for its outstanding heroism during the events of the WWII, Sevastopol epitomizes 'some of the inmost mental shrines of Russia' (Ascherson 1995, as quoted in Charron 2016), with its long history of resistance to foreign threats and monuments meant to manifest Russian military spirit (Charron 2016; Ascherson 1995). In a way, it represents one of the manifestations of the post-Soviet Russian nationalism in its attempt to reclaim both the imperial Russian and Soviet mythology of Sevastopol in order to assert the unquestionable 'Russianness' of Crimea (Sasse 2007).

With Sevastopol and other locations directly related to the military actions of the WWII (Kerch and the Battle of Kerch Peninsula, Yevpatoria and the Yevpatoria assault by the Soviet marine battalion etc) all used in an effort to appeal to the same shared memory, the importance of the WWII package for the overarching frame and Russian Crimean narrative as a whole becomes difficult to ignore. Here we can see that the memory of WWII takes the form of its own separate package that we will define as a ***great patriotic package*** for the purpose of this research. Not only does the 'great patriotic package' use the events of the past to connect Crimea to Russia: it draws parallel between the opposing sides of the war (the Soviet Union against the Nazis) and current conflict (Russia against Ukraine and the West).

The frame of historical significance is also reflected in the most persistent package that the Russian narrative uses when describing the annexation of Crimea: ***the package of 'reuniting'***. The term 'reuniting' (*vossoedinenie, prisoedinenie,* sometimes - *vozvrashchenie*) is the most persistent one within Crimean narrative. Although Vladimir Putin only used it three times in his March 2014 address, it is a term of consistent use in the Russian media. Official website

of "Channel One " uses it 77 times in the year 2014 (with *vossoedinenie* making 59, *prisoedinenie* 14, and *vozvrashchenie* - 4). The prevailing nature of this particular package is best illustrated by its usage, which is neither limited to 2014 nor to the mainstream, pro-governmental media: *"Ekho Moskvy"*, a media outlet which is often considered to be more liberal and critical of the ruling regime, uses the word "reuniting" when describing the events of Crimean annexation around 53 times from January to July of 2021[51]. '*Ekho Moskvy*' consistently uses all the Russian narrative frames on Crimea: even in 2021, when most mainstream media sources have changed their Crimean rhetoric into the one of normalization, 'Ekho Moskvy' continues to work with now outdated packages of 'taking' Crimea[52], of Crimea 'going to Russia'[53] (implying the peaceful and democratic nature of the process), 'reuniting' with 'our' Crimea[54] etc. It should be noticed, however, that *Novaya Gazeta* takes different approach: out of all the media outlets in question it was the only one to use the term 'annexation' more often than 'reuniting'[55].

The roots of both 'great patriotic' and 'reuniting' packages are deep within the frame of historical and military significance, with the main claim behind it being that Crimea has always been rightfully Russian. However, in order to be viable, every package has to be able to deal with the circumstances surrounding its key claim (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). Thus, to put it simply, in order to work the packages must be able to address several historical realities that drastically differ from the one created by the narrative.

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[51] Source: Ekho Moskvy official website, https://echo.msk.ru/, key search words: 'Krym vozvrashchenie', 'Krym prisoedinenie', 'Krym vossoedenenie', search conducted 02.06.21

[52] Zotikov D., Nedostroennaja Imperija, available at https://echo.msk.ru/blog/shotabich/2884310-echo/, accessed 02.06.2021

[53] Mamin Yurii, Razbor polyota, available at ttps://echo.msk.ru/programs/razbor_poleta/2886862-echo/, accessed 02.06.2021

[54] Markow Sergei, Personal'no vash, available at https://echo.msk.ru/programs/personalnovash/2882042-echo/, accessed 02.06.2021

[55] Source: Novaya Gazeta official website, https://novayagazeta.ru/, key search words: ''Krym vozvrashchenie', 'Krym prisoedinenie', 'Krym vossoedenenie', 'Krym anneksiya', search conducted 02.06.2021

For instance, the 'reuniting' package has to be able to address the matter of the first Crimean annexation under the Russian empress Catherine II: Crimea was not Russian prior to the events of 1783 and had very little connection to the Russian Empire or its people. Another, more pressing, matter to address is the transfer of Crimea to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic by Nikita Khrushchev in 1954, and, finally, the fact of Crimean existence as a part of independent Ukraine since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Putin's address deals with all three to a certain degree of success. The first annexation of Crimea is dealt with briefly: perhaps, due to the less urgent nature of this issue:

'V Krymu – mogily russkikh soldat, muzhestvom kotorykh Krym v 1783 godu byl vzi͡at pod Rossi͡isku͡iu derzhavu.'

'The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea.'[56]

The choice of vocabulary in this fragment is meant to go together with the reuniting package: the official English translation does not convey the nuance of the Russian verb *'vzi͡at''* — to take, as well as the preposition *'pod'* — under. Therefore, the direct translation of this piece would sound more along the lines of 'Crimea was *taken under* the Russian state'. The implied meaning here is the one of patronage and protection, and a noble sacrifice ('the graves of Russian soldiers') meant to create a feeling of righteousness and justify the military actions. This wording also implies that Crimea has rightfully belonged to Russia ever since, which allows to frame the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine and Crimea subsequently remaining as a part of the independent Ukraine after 1991 as

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[56] 'Address by President of the Russian Federation'…

malicious or short-sighted. The key justification here is the wrongdoings and miscalculations of the Bolsheviks and Nikita Khrushchev personally:

'Posle revoliûtsii bol'sheviki po raznym soobrazheniiam, pust' Bog im budet sud'iâ, vkliûchili v sostav Ukrainskoĭ soiûznoĭ respubliki znachitel'nye territorii istoricheskogo iûga Rossii. Ėto bylo sdelano bez uchëta natsional'nogo sostava zhiteleĭ, i segodniâ ėto sovremennyĭ iûgo-vostok Ukrainy. A v 1954 godu posledovalo reshenie o peredache v eë sostav i Krymskoĭ oblasti, zaodno peredali i Sevastopol', khotiâ on byl togda soiûznogo podchineniia. Initsiatorom byl lichno glava Kommunisticheskoĭ partii Sovetskogo Soiûza Hrushchëv. Chto im dvigalo – stremlenie zaruchit'siâ podderzhkoĭ ukrainskoĭ nomenklatury ili zagladit' svoiû vinu za organizatsiiu massovykh repressiĭ na Ukraine v 30-e gody – pust' s ėtim razbiraiûtsiâ istoriki. (...) Dliâ nas vazhno drugoe: ėto reshenie bylo priniato s ochevidnymi narusheniiami deĭstvovavshikh dazhe togda konstitutsionnykh norm. Vopros reshili kuluarno, mezhdusoboĭchikom.'

'After the revolution, the Bolsheviks, for a number of reasons – may God judge them – added large sections of the historical South of Russia to the Republic of Ukraine. This was done with no consideration for the ethnic make-up of the population, and today these areas form the southeast of Ukraine. Then, in 1954, a decision was made to transfer Crimean Region to Ukraine, along with Sevastopol, despite the fact that it was a federal city. This was the personal initiative of the Communist Party head Nikita Khrushchev. What stood behind this decision of his – a desire to win the support of the Ukrainian political establishment or to atone for the mass repressions of the 1930's in Ukraine – is for historians to figure out. (...) What matters now is that this decision was made

in clear violation of the constitutional norms that were in place even then. The decision was made behind the scenes.'[57]

The highly mythologized interpretation of the 1954 events as Crimea being 'gifted' to Ukraine by Nikita Khruschev has been questioned by multiple historians, with various sources pointing at the transition being completed according to the legal norms of the day (Sasse 2007; Charron 2016). However, the Russian interpretation claims the unauthorized nature of the inclusion and uses it as a basis for its own actions in 2014.

The 'great patriotic' package, in its turn, has to be able to deal with the fact that WWII ended with the defeat of Germany in 1945; that Ukraine was a part of the Soviet Union at the time and took a heavy hit both fighting and being the battleground for the two totalitarian systems; finally, that National Socialism was not a state ideology in either Ukraine or any of the Western countries in 2014. This is where the package adapts by framing Ukraine as the direct enemy of Russia: it does so by appealing to the Russian collective memory of WWII and the history of Ukrainian resistance against the Soviet Union, consistently framed by the Soviet historians as Nazi collaboration.

The role of Ukraine in the Crimean narrative, especially during the early stages of annexation, is the one of an enemy. In the post-2014 Russian narrative Ukraine is depicted as an 'anti-Russian' (Suslov 2014) entity: a cleverly constructed nemesis, once again appealing to the Russian collective memory of WWII. This framing is viewed by Gaufman as one of securitization: in an attempt to depict an external figure as a threat, and thus justify and legitimize any measures taken in order to combat this threat (Gaufman 2015). This is especially obvious in the now infamous discourse of the so-called 'Ukrainian fascism': an idea that the events of Euromaidan brought neo-Nazis to power in Ukraine. By

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[57] 'Address by President of the Russian Federation'…

openly branding Ukrainian government and people who support it 'fascists', 'Nazis' and 'banderites' the Russian narrative contributes to putting the Ukrainian side in the special category: a category that has been seen as less than human for decades following the events of WWII (Gaufman 2015). Not only is it meant to justify any actions taken in order to 'defend' Crimea, it is also used by both Russian media and officials to justify Russian actions in Donbas.

There are sixteen mentions of the words "fascism in Ukraine" on the official "Channel One" website in 2014[58]. Three out of those fall on March 7th, with three articles published within a three-hour gap each: "Mass rallies in solidarity with the fraternal (sic!) nation of Ukraine carried out across Russia"[59], "More Russian cities are joining the campaign to support the peaceful population of Ukraine"[60], "Russians rally in support of compatriots *(sootechestvennikov)* in Ukraine"[61]. It is important to point out that the rallies covered in the articles are all carried out under similar slogans, with "Let's save Crimea from fascism!", "Leave no man behind" (directly translated as 'We are not leaving our people behind' - *Svoikh ne brosaem*), "We are together" (*My vmeste*) among the key ones. These slogans, directly derived from the key ideas of the 'Russian World' ideology, operate solemnly on the basis of tremendous existential threat to the rights of Russian 'compatriots' abroad, and illustrate that the securitization aspect of the Russian narrative surrounding Crimea and Ukraine was present in the

[58] Source: Channel One official website, https://www.1tv.ru/, key search words: 'Ukraina fashism', 'fashism na Ukraine', search conducted 04.06.2021

[59] Po vseĭ Rossii — massovye mitingi v znak solidarnosti s bratskim narodom Ukrainy, available at https://www.1tv.ru/news/2014-03-07/45405-po_vsey_rossii_massovye_mitingi_v_znak_solidarnosti_s_bratskim_narodom_ukrainy, accessed 04.06.2021

[60] Vse bol'she rossiĭskikh gorodov vkli͡uchai͡uts͡ia v akts͡ii͡u podderzhki mirnogo naseleni͡ia Ukrainy, available at https://www.1tv.ru/news/2014-03-07/45377-vse_bolshe_rossiyskih_gorodov_vklyuchayutsya_v_aktsiyu_podderzhki_mirnogo_naseleniya_ukrainy, accessed 04.06.2021

[61] Rossii͡ane vykhodi͡at na mitingi v podderzhku sootechestvennikov na Ukraine, available at: https://www.1tv.ru/news/2014-03-07/45384-rossiyane_vyhodyat_na_mitingi_v_podderzhku_sootechestvennikov_na_ukraine, accessed 04.06.2021

discourse before the active phase of the Crimean annexation. An example of this frame can be seen in the following fragment of the address:

'Povtoriu͡, on budet, kak i bylo vekami, rodnym domom dli͡a predstavitelei͡ vsekh zhivushchikh tam narodov. No on nikogda ne budet banderovskim!'

'I repeat, just as it has been for centuries, it will be a home to all the peoples living there. What it will never be and do is follow in Bandera's footsteps!'[62]

The **geopolitization frame** puts Crimea in the center of an imaginary conflict, 'the great game' between Russia and the West (Hopf 2016), with the opposing entity (the West) attempting to take over what is perceived as rightfully Russian. This is one of the aspects where securitization of Crimean annexation is the most well-pronounced, with NATO portrayed as presenting a potential threat to Russian security, and Russia subsequently trying to stay ahead of the curve:

'What would this [Ukraine joining NATO] have meant for Crimea and Sevastopol in the future? It would have meant that NATO's navy would be right there in this city of Russia's military glory, and this would create not an illusory but a perfectly real threat to the whole of southern Russia.'[63]

Not only does this approach, as pointed out by Suslov, highlights the ideological weakness of the Russian state that prefers to appeal to its own objective truth rather than the moral values or international legislation (Suslov 2014, p. 589), it also diminishes Ukraine, Crimea and Crimean people to the status of objects in a bigger political scheme (Nedozhogina 2019). What presents

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[62] 'Address by President of the Russian Federation'…
[63] Same as above

a lot of interest is that, despite the narrative of justification and attempts at normalization of annexation, in many cases Crimea represents the other to the Russianness just as much as Ukraine (Nedozhogina 2019). This peculiar trait of the Russian narrative did not go away with time: even with the recent trend towards normalization and desensationalization of Crimea in the Russian media, the depiction of the peninsula remains distinctly different from the other regions of Russia.

The **sacralization frame** is rooted in the role of the Russian Orthodox Church, central to modern Russian identity (Suslov 2014). Affiliation with the Church provides the narrative with a broad range of spiritual metaphors, the likes of which include the packages of "Holy Russia" (*Sviataia Rus'*), "the Third Rome", asserting Moscow as a direct heir to Roman Empire, as well as the semi-mythical baptism of Vladimir the Great. Putin mentions the latter aspect in his address:

'Zdes' drevnii Xersones, gde priniął kreshchenie sviątoi kniaz' Vladimir. Ego dukhovnyi podvig – obrashchenie k pravoslaviiŭ – predopredelil obshchuiŭ kul'turnuiŭ, t͡sennostnuiŭ, t͡siviliza͡tsionnuiŭ osnovu, kotoraią ob''ediniąet narody Rossii, Ukrainy i Belorussii.'

'This is the location of ancient Chersonese, where Prince Vladimir was baptized. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.'[64]

The support of the Russian Orthodox Church is an important piece of the Russian world puzzle: used as a part of the Russian 'hybrid warfare' as a non-military element in the war in Ukraine (Simons 2016; Leustean 2017, as quoted

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[64] Same as above

in Lamoreaux and Flake 2018), it played a significant role in depicting 'the West' and Ukraine as corrupt, ungodly and hence and anti-Russian (Lamoreaux1 & Flake 2018). This, in its turn, was used to further justify the annexation of Crimea on a spiritual level and helped to portray it as saving Crimeans not only from the 'fascists', but from the devil himself.

The three frames that form the Russian narrative of Crimea do not exist independently from each other: they interact and intertwine. They often act as a securitization device: in an attempt to create a narrative suitable for the Russian side (in this case — the one that would justify the annexation of Crimea), the other side of the conflict is being painted as illegitimate at best and as a direct threat at worst, which leads to extraordinary measures taken by the Russian government being seemingly justified and excused within the narrative (Gaufman 2015).

It should be pointed out, however, that the recent tendency in Russian media seems to shift towards a different approach: de-sensationalizing of the Crimean annexation and normalization of Crimea as a part of Russia. This is better illustrated by the gradual decline in the usage of previously common packages, with expressions such as 'reuniting' and 'returning' visibly missing from constant rotation on the mainstream media websites[65]. The most recent article of Vladimir Putin pays more attention to the situation in Ukraine and continues framing Ukraine as a part of the 'Russian world', with attempts to rebuild the 'fraternal nations' narrative through the shared history and 'great patriotic frame' re-applied to all of the country[66]. The narrative-building efforts around Crimea seem to have taken to social media, with Crimea-related topics

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[65] Sources: Channel one official website https://www.1tv.ru/, RT official website https://www.rt.com/, accessed 01.07.2021

[66] Vladimir Putin, 'Stat'ja Vladimira Putina «Ob istoricheskom edinstve russkih i ukraincev»' (Vladimir Putin's article on historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians', available at http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181, accessed 20.07.2021

initiating a response reminiscent of the agitated Crimea narrative of 2014 and 2015.

Chapter 5. "Crimea is Ukraine": Ukrainian narrative of Crimea

At first glance, hundreds of years of Russian imperial myth-building invoked by the Kremlin in order to justify its actions in Crimea put the Ukrainian side at a disadvantage. There is seemingly little to no national mythology that Ukrainian officials can employ in order to connect Crimea to Ukraine in a believable manner, with Kyiv only receiving control over the region in 1954 (Charron 2016). However, it is important to keep in mind that most of the opinions on Crimea and Ukraine are either directly formed or heavily influenced by the Russian narrative, with first imperial and then Soviet historians carefully curating how Crimean and Ukrainian history as a whole were being told (Wilson 2015). This makes Ukrainian narrative a retort by definition: a lot of the elements within it are in direct response to frames and packages brought up by the Russian narrative. This also makes the Ukrainian narrative of Crimea a distinct securitization attempt: it employs the techniques meant to protect Ukraine from various kinds of Russian information warfare, among which the narrative is one of the most prominent tools. The only difference (and perhaps an unexpected winning ground for Ukraine) is the Crimean Tatar narrative, cleverly incorporated into an overarching political narrative of present-day Ukraine in order to convey an image of a newly formed Ukrainian identity, civic and inclusive, united in its diversity (Charron 2016).

The unique feature of the Ukrainian narrative of Crimea is that observing it from the year 2014 means observing it being created: there was little to no

Crimea narrative on both official level and among the media prior to the events of 2014. This can be partially explained by the issues of Ukrainian identity-building that we mentioned before: the lack of motivation within society to create a clearly defined national strategy and indifference of the state. A drastic divide between the Russian- and Ukrainian-identifying population of the country was deepened by competing political forces and made the ethnic identity-building project impossible, and there was a uniting national idea missing for the civic identity-building to become possible as well (Wilson 2002). This significantly slowed down the process of Crimean integration into mainland Ukraine and resulted in lack of any compelling 'Crimea is Ukraine' narrative prior to the annexation, with the population of Crimea having a stronger regional identity rather than the national one: to put it simply, Crimeans perceived themselves as Crimean first (Charron 2016; Nedozhogina 2019).

Therefore, the Ukrainian narrative of Crimea that began to emerge as a response to the Russian aggression of 2014 was deeply intertwined with the civic identity-building process within post-Maidan Ukraine and thus shared some of its key characteristics. The inevitable connection to the Russian narrative, amplified by the ongoing conflict and shared memory and historical past, predetermines the competing nature of some of the packages, with many of them emerging as a direct retort to the ones within the Russian narrative.

2014: denial and first attempts at retort

On February 20th of 2014 the first military troops in unmarked uniforms appeared on the streets of Crimea. On March 16th, an illegal referendum about the status of Crimean Peninsula was held only for Crimea to become a part of the Russian Federation on March 18th. The military operation leading to the annexation of Crimea took less than a month. In the meantime, Ukraine was just

coming back to its senses after the events of Euromaidan, with Viktor Yanukovych removed from power on February 21st and Oleksandr Turchynov becoming an acting President of Ukraine.

This chaotic state of the country can be used to explain the initial lack of proper response; the other reason for it is what can only be described as denial, with *Ukraïns'ka pravda* mentioning Crimean events for the first time on February 23rd by claiming that the self-defense squads in Sevastopol are organizing a 'Russian unit' (*Russkiy blok,* which is meant to showcase the ethnic component rather than affiliation with the Russian Federation and its military) and anti-tank gear is appearing on the streets near the city[67]. Russia is mentioned for the first time on February 27th, in the article titled 'Ukrainians of Crimea are asking the authorities to protect them'[68]. The article is based around an anonymous statement provided by Interfax Ukraine, with authors of the statement — allegedly Ukrainian citizens of Crimea — asking the international community to 'influence Russian position regarding the support of separatism in Ukrainian regions of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol' ("*vplynuty na pozycìû Rosìï pro neprypustymìst' provokuvannâ separatyzmu v regìonah Ukraïni, zokrema, v ARK ì m. Sevastopolì*").

Channel 5 (*P'âtij kanal*), one of the most consistent and active media sources in relation to covering the events of Euromaidan, barely mentioned the topic of Crimea until February 24th. An article titled 'Border guards denied the strengthening of Russian troops in Crimea' *("Prikordonniky sprostuvaly posylennâ vìjs'k RF v Krymu")*[69] says that despite politician Oleh Tyahnybok's plea to double-check Crimea and Ukrainian borders for presence of Russian

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[67] U Sevastopolì zagoni samooboroni formuvatime "Rus'kij blok", pìd mìstom - protitankovì "ïžaki", 23 February 2014, available at https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/02/23/7016000/, accessed 12.05.2021

[68] Ukraïncì Krimu poprosili vladu pro zahist, 27 February 2014, available at https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/02/27/7016570/, accessed 12.05.2021

[69] Channel 5, 24 February 2014, available at https://www.5.ua/polityka/prykordonnyky-sprostuvaly-posylennia-viisk-rf-v-krymu-31951.html, accessed 12.05.2021

military, border guards of Ukraine stated that 'there were no movement of any Russian troops near Ukrainian borders' (*"Žodnyh peresuvan' vìjs'k poblyzu kordonìv Ukraïni nemaê"*).

What could be interpreted as another example of the inability of Ukrainian officials to come to terms with the earliest stages of annexation is lack of direct address of the topic by the key officials in 2014. Crimea question was ostensibly missing from the first address of the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko to the Parliament (*Verkhovnaya Rada)* on November 27th[70]. Earlier that year, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Ukrainian Prime Minister at the time, mentioned Crimea in his March 7th interview to the CNBC television channel by stating that the referendum was 'an illegitimate decision" and that "Crimea was, is and will be an integral part of Ukraine'[71].

In the first months following the annexation when, despite the lack of official guidance from the freshly-formed government and a united narrative missing from the mainstream media sources, one noticeable media exception emerged: *Krym.Realìï* project was created in the spring of 2014 by the Ukrainian branch of *Radio Svoboda* (Radio Liberty, sponsored by the United States Congress). Officially the project, many contributors of which still live and report from Crimea[72], is dedicated to covering the current situation on the occupied peninsula; in reality, it is the strongest media link between Crimea and Ukraine and one of the most effective narrative-building tools at Ukrainian disposal. Many of the materials posted on the *Krym.Realìï* website present a direct response to the packages within the Russian narrative, while some attempt to replace Russian imperial myth with newly emerging Ukrainian once. This once again emphasizes

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[70] Chesno.ua, Prezident govorit': âk zmìnûvalis' poslannâ Porošenka deputatam, available at https://www.chesno.org/post/4025/?__cf_chl_jschl_tk__=pmd_f67c7937f03fd352874ab6e96dce4e160 4f553c5-1627328657-0-gqNtZGzNAg2jcnBszQi6, accessed 12.05.2021

[71] CNN, Ukraine PM: Crimea 'was, is and will be an integral part of Ukraine', URL: https://edition.cnn.com/2014/03/06/world/europe/ukraine-russia-tensions/index.html, accessed 12.05.2021

[72] https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-krym-realii-peremoha-vysoki-standarty-zhurnalistyky/30997596.html

the issue of Ukrainian narrative fluctuating between anti-colonial and post-colonial rhetoric: a problem of many countries with colonial past.

Anti-colonialism and national myth-building

With the Ukrainian narrative of Crimea gradually emerging from the shadow of its Russian counterpart, the issues of shared memory and past were bound to arise. Not only is Ukraine trying to create a competing narrative when it comes to Crimea: it creates its own narrative of Ukraine. This is where the danger of mistaking post-colonialism with anti-colonialism and falling into a trap of reconstructing imaginary pre-colonial reality arises: a mistake common among many post-colonial nations (Wilson 2015, p. 213). The debates on whether or not Ukraine should be considered a post-colonial nation at all are still occurring (Wilson 2015); however, it is undeniable that a countless number of elements within Ukrainian public sphere, cultural space and national mythology bear a strong resemblance to the one of post-colonial country.

The biggest threat of a competing narrative emerging solemnly as a response to aggression of Russia — an ex-metropolis with shared history and culture — is to fall into radicalization pit, with harmful imperial patterns and narrative frames reinterpreted into nationalistic ones. There was an urge to get out of a cultural limbo that Ukraine existed in since the Soviet collapse, with Ukrainian and Russian cultural elements sometimes used interchangeably, and an opportunity to do so presented itself in building up a narrative-response to Russian aggression which encourages replacing pre-existing imperial myths with national myths of one's own (Wilson 2015). In the case of Crimean narrative this is best shown in attempts to reclaim and redefine events from Crimean history, starting with *Vladimir* the Great and *Volodymyr* the Great, both baptized in Crimea, but essentially representing two different people: a founder of Russia and

Kievan Rus'. To put it simply, creating 'Ukrainian world' as opposed to 'the Russian world' is an anticolonial response to aggression, when subverting the key stereotypes and myths of 'the Russian world' would be an example of a post-colonial approach.

Ukrainian narrative often finds itself trading the line between post-colonial and anti-colonial rhetoric, with both justified in their own sense. One of the reasons for the Ukrainian anti-colonial rhetoric — filled with attempts to create mythology of its own, retaliatory rather than attacking in nature — is predetermined by its securitizing nature, meant to respond and react to Russia 'delivering the first punch'. The post-colonial rhetoric finds itself amidst debunking of the Russian tropes, such as 'reuniting' and 'Crimea being gifted to Ukraine by Khrushchev'. The main frame and the packages within it that can be established within the Ukrainian narrative of Crimea exist between the two approaches, with some appearing directly inspired by the Russian narrative, and some meant to demystify the Russian take on events.

The post-colonial rhetoric is best showcased by an indisputable leverage to Ukrainian perspective and subsequent claim regarding Crimea: an almost unanimous support of Ukrainian narrative by the international community, with the international law on its side. This support and the rule of law backing up Ukrainian claims are fundamental to the foundation of Ukrainian Crimea narrative: the indisputable illegality of the Russian actions in Crimea. To a certain extent, this explains the existence of only one frame within the Ukrainian narrative of Crimea. *Crimea is Ukraine* (*Krym ce Ukraïna*) is the only guiding frame of the Ukrainian narrative of Crimea. The slogan, created as an elegant response to the Russian "Crimea is ours" (Charron 2016), represents the essence of the frame: the firm belief in Crimea as an integral part of Ukraine.

Annexation *(aneksìâ)* package, often used interchangeably with the *occupation* (o*kupacìâ)* or *temporary occupation* (*tymčasova okupacìâ*), is meant to highlight the illegal nature of Russian aggression and the events of 2014. This

package is largely missing from the early stages of the media narrative development: for example, *Ukraïns'ka pravda* refers to the peninsula as simply 'Crimea' (*Krym*) throughout the first years of annexation[73]. Interestingly enough, the frame remains unchanged: this usage is explained by the rooted perception of Crimea as inherently Ukrainian. However, this changes in the recent year: in the articles starting from 2018 the word Crimea is more often than not prefaced by the words 'annexed' (*aneksovany*) or 'occupied' (*okupovany*)[74]. *Krym.Realii* uses similar language, and, for instance, describes Russian army entering Crimea as *'zahvat'* (takeover) [75]. One of the most conspicuous elements in this package is the 'temporary occupation' (*tymčasova okupacìâ)* meant to emphasize the perceived fleeting nature of Russian presence in Crimea and directly compete with the Russian 'reuniting' package meant to prove the indivisibility of Crimea from the Russian Federation.

As it can be evident from the articles provided above, at the earliest stage of the annexation Ukraine did not have any clear Crimean narrative: it is better characterized by the state of shock. However, the key frame was already present, and the packages became apparent no later than by the year 2015, with Petro Poroshenko, Ukrainian president at the time, stating:

"Ukraïns'ka deržava poverne kontrol' nad tymčasovo okupovanoû teritorìêû. Ne budu s'ogodnì govoryty, ŝo ce vìdbuvatymet'sâ švydko ì prosto. Ale ce stanet'sâ obov'âzkovo"

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[73] 'KrymSOS" zapuskaye resurs, shho informuvatyme ukrayins"kyx ta inozemnyx zhurnalistiv pro podiyi v Krymu', available at https://life.pravda.com.ua/society/2015/05/1/193361/, accessed 10.06.2021

[74] 'Brytaniya ne vyznaye holosuvannya v Krymu za "obnulennya" Putina', available at https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2020/07/3/7111782/, accessed 10.06.2021

[75] "Zahvat Kryma Rossiej: bel'bekskij «proryv» polkovnika Mamčura" (The seizure of Crimea by Russia: the Belbek "breakthrough" of Colonel Mamchur), available at https://ru.krymr.com/a/krym-belbekskiy-proryv-polkovnika-mamchura/31132929.html, accessed 06.05.21

*"The Ukrainian state will regain control over the **temporarily occupied territory**. I will not say today that this will happen quickly and easily. But it will definitely happen."* [76]

However, as it was previously mentioned, in order to be viable the package has to be able to address several claims, in this particular case — the ones of the Russian side. In particular, the Russian narrative states that Crimea has always been Russian, and that the only reason for Crimea to be considered a part of Ukraine was an individual and thus illegal decision of Nikita Khrushchev. The Ukrainian narrative retorts by challenging the historical accuracy of those claims. In particular, one of the links on the main page of *Krym.Realii* website leads to a 'Inclusion of Crimea into Ukraine' (*Vklûčenie Kryma v sostav Ukrainy*) infographic that discusses in detail the transfer of Crimea into Ukrainian SSR in 1954[77]. The choice of vocabulary here is deliberate: it is more neutral than the words 'transfer' (*peredacha*) or 'gift' (*podarok*) often used by the Russian narrative when talking about these events. The page pays special attention to the chronology of events and the issue of legality, emphasizing that the decision was not made individually by Nikita Khrushchev, was justified by geographic proximity of the peninsula to Ukraine and was fully within the legal system of the time:

'Sovet Ministrov Rossijskoj Sovetskoj Federativnoj Socialističeskoj Respubliki prinimaet Postanovlenie o celesoobraznosti peredači Krymskoj oblasti iz sostava RSFSR v sostav USSR. V kačestve pričiny nazyvaetsâ «territorial'noe tâgotenie Krymskoj oblasti k Ukrainskoj SSR, obŝnost' èkonomiki

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[76] 'Poroshenko: Ukrayina nikoly ne vidmovyt"sya vid prav na Krym', available at https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/news_in_brief/2015/02/150223_rl_poroshenko_crimea_adress, accessed 11.06.2021

[77] 'Vkljuchenie Kryma v Sostav Ukrainy', available at https://ru.krymr.com/a/vklychenie-kryma-v-sostav-ukraine/29874678.html, accessed 11.06.2021

i tesnye hozâjstvennye i kul'turnye svâzi meždu Krymskoj oblast'û i Ukrainskoj SSR'

'The Council of Ministers of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic adopts a Resolution on the expediency of inclusion of the Crimean Region from the RSFSR to the Ukrainian SSR. The main justification behind it is "the territorial proximity of the Crimean region to the Ukrainian SSR, the common economy and close economic and cultural ties between the Crimean region and the Ukrainian SSR'[78]

The Crimea Operation of 1918 in which Crimea was liberated from Bolsheviks by Ukrainian troops and German army is another point of great historical significance for the Ukrainian narrative. Another infographic on *Krym.Realii* talks about the operation in great detail, with an emphasis put on the support of the operation by the Crimean Tatars[79].

This brings us to another compelling package that cements Ukrainian connection to Crimea and is also present within the frame: it is the package dealing with the native population of Crimea, ***qirimli,*** or ***Crimean Tatars***. The first acknowledgement of the *qirimli* package by the Ukrainian officials occurs in 2015, with Petro Poroshenko stating that it was the 'Moscow Bolsheviks in Crimea' who killed Noman Çelebicihan, the head and founder of the Crimean Tatar Qurultay in 1918[80]. The importance of this package is hard to deny: it goes in line with current civic identity-building route taken by the Ukrainian government (Wilson 2015), emphasizes the multicultural essence of a newly

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[78] 'Vklyuchenie Kryma v sostav Ukrainy', 'February 5th', available at https://ru.krymr.com/a/vklychenie-kryma-v-sostav-ukraine/29874678.html, accessed 12.06.2021
[79] Krymskaja operacija Petra Bolbochana 1918 g., available at https://ru.krymr.com/a/interactive-map-polkovnik-petr-bolbochan-krym/29189950.html, accessed 15.06.2021
[80] Poroshenko: Ukrayina nikoly ne vidmovyt"sya vid prav na Krym', available at https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/news_in_brief/2015/02/150223_rl_poroshenko_crimea_adress, accessed 11.06.2021

rebuilt Ukraine and presents an incredible tool against the Russian world ideology-guided narrative, with Russia seen by many in the Crimean Tatar community as a direct perpetrator of the Crimean Tatar genocide that was never held accountable for its actions (Charron 2016). This immense historical trauma of the Crimean Tatars has always reinforced Crimean Tatars' support of deeper integration of Crimea into Ukraine. Ukraine, in its turn, recognized the 1944 deportation as genocide[81]. The most recent development in the Ukrainian-Crimean Tatar cooperation was the law "On the indigenous peoples of Ukraine", adopted by the Ukrainian government on July 1st 2021[82]. Alongside Crimean Tatars, two other peoples of Crimea are listed as indigenous: karaites and krymchaks.

In some instances, the package works by appealing to the shared past - for example, by talking about the days of Crimean khanate and its relations with the Cossacks of Zaporoz'ka Sich[83]. However, it is the topic of the deportation of Crimean Tatar community by the Soviet government that receives most attention: there are dozens articles dedicated to the topic on *Krym.Realii* website alone[84]. It can be argued that among the goals set by appealing to a topic of such magnitude is a parallel between the deportation and the annexation of 2014, with many Crimean Tatars forced to flee from Crimea, and the rest facing threats and discrimination from the occupier. For instance, one of the most recent articles on ATR.ua website, the main voice for the Crimea Tatar community, titled 'The occupiers continue to choose precautionary measures against Crimean Tatars detained after the raids', talks about the recent detention of persecuted Crimean

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[81] 'Deportaciya kryms"kyx tatar = henocyd' (Deportation of Crimean tatars = genocide), available at https://ukurier.gov.ua/uk/articles/deportaciya-krimskih-tatar-genocid/, accessed 13.07.2021

[82] 'Prezydent pidpysav Zakon «Pro korinni narody Ukrayiny»' (President signed a law on Native population of Ukraine), available at https://www.president.gov.ua/news/prezident-pidpisav-zakon-pro-korinni-narodi-ukrayini-69677, accessed 21.07.2021

[83] 'Krymskoe hanstvo i kazaki: ot vrazhdy k sojuzu | Krymskie.Istorii' (Crimean khanate and Cossacks: from hostility to alliance | Crimean stories), audio available at https://ru.krymr.com/a/29031523.html, accessed 22.07.2021

[84] 'Deportacija krymskih tatar' (Crimean Tatar deportation), materials available at https://ru.krymr.com/z/17010, accessed 22.07.2021

Tatars[85]. Crimean Tatar package adds to the competing nature of the Ukrainian narrative: it creates a direct contradiction to the claims of the Russian side, trying to portray Crimean Tatar population of Crimea as content and even grateful for the events of 2014[86].

The competing nature of the Ukrainian narrative is also highlighted in the recent inner developments: as opposed to the Russian trend towards de-sensationalizing Crimea and attempting to normalize the annexation, official Ukrainian narrative is putting an additional emphasis on Crimea remaining an integral part of Ukraine, with current Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky stating in one of his speeches:

"Krym buv sercem Ukraïni. Sonâčnim, dobrim, svìtlym. Sìm rokìv tomu u nas vyrvaly serce. Mi nìkoly ne zabudemo, hto ce zrobyv ì nìkoly ne zabudemo, hto dozvolyv ce zrobyty. Dehto perekonuvav, ŝo vyrvav naše serce zakonno ì vvìčlivo, a teper, styskaûči jogo v rukah, ŝyro dyvuêt'sâ, čomu Ukraïna obražena, čomu ne hoče maty dobryh vìdnosyn, čomu stìl'ky nenavystì, čomu Ukraïna ne može c'ogo zabuty ì probačyti… Treba povernuty ïï serce, povernuty Krym".

'Crimea was the heart of Ukraine: kind, bright and full of sunshine. Seven years ago our heart was torn out of our chest. We will never forget who did it and we will never forget who allowed it. Someone [Russia] was trying to prove that he tore our heart out legally and politely, and is now acting surprised that Ukraine is offended, that Ukraine does not want to have good relations, that there is so much hatred, that Ukraine cannot forgive and forget — all this while

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85 'Okupanty prodovzhuyut" obyraty zapobizhni zaxody zatrymanym pislya oblav kryms"kym tataram — cherha Rustema Murasova ta Zaura Abdullayeva: ZAMAN', available at https://atr.ua/news/201032-okupanti-prodovzuut-obirati-zapobizni-zahodi-zatrimanim-pisla-oblav-krimskim-tataram-cerga-rustema-murasova-ta-zaura-abdullaeva-zaman, accessed 23.08.2021
86 «Novye sposoby diskriminacii»: k chemu mozhet privesti prinjatie zakona «O korennyh narodah Ukrainy», available at https://russian.rt.com/ussr/article/880860-zakon-korennye-narody-ukraina-russkie, accessed 21.07.2021

holding our heart in his hands… The heart must be returned; Crimea must be returned.''[87]

Although the initial Ukrainian narrative of Crimea could hardly compete with years of Russian imperial myth-building, years following the annexation proved that Ukraine is capable of creating the narrative adequate enough to present a competition to the Russian rhetoric. With post-colonial and anti-colonial often intertwined, Ukraine created a narrative of a region torn away from home by the hostile foreign force. Implementing elements of civic identity-building to the narrative construction, it uses the historical, political and cultural packages to retort. With the Russian narrative of Crimea seemingly muffled by the normalization attempts, Ukraine takes various approaches in order to compete, with the recent initiatives in recognizing Crimean Tatars as native population of Ukraine among elements of narrative- and identity-building. Based on the state of Ukrainian media and the key characteristics of the conflict and the Ukrainian identity-shaping processes, as well as the nature of the frames and packages that constitute the narrative, it seems more appropriate to define Ukrainian narrative as ***counter-hegemonic***, with a lot of its key elements deriving out of the direct opposition to the tools implemented by the Russian side.

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[87] 'Zelens"kyj pro Krym: 7 rokiv tomu u nas vyrvaly serce' (Zelensky about Crimea: 7 years ago our hearts were torn out), available at https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2021/02/26/7284807/, accessed 01.08.2021

Conclusion

As a matter incorporating memory, identity and ideology, narrative has become a prominent field of political competition in recent years: by owning the narrative, political actors create stories and meanings that benefit their goals. In this dissertation, I explored two drastically different narratives of the same place: Russian and Ukrainian narratives of Crimea, conceptualized here as hegemonic with legality among the factors contributing to the definition.

With the 2014 annexation of Crimea and military aggression against Ukraine started by the Russian Federation, among the many tools used by Russia in order to justify its action was the creation of the national narrative surrounding Crimean Peninsula. The Russian narrative of Crimea presents a structure of many layers and multitude of meanings, incorporating hundreds of years of national myths and the most recent attempt to fill in the post-Soviet Russian identity vacuum: the Russian world (*Russkiy mir*) ideology.

The Ukrainian narrative of Crimea that had to emerge as a response to the Russian aggression is competing in nature and traces a line between decolonization and reconstruction of an imaginary pre-colonial reality, with newly formed Ukrainian narrative either challenging or replacing the old myths of the Soviet Union and Russian Empire. This turns Ukrainian narrative into counter-hegemonic, and thus challenging the Russian narrative on the international stage.

Using selected media sources as representation of the two narratives, I applied the framing theory in order to establish the most prevalent frames and packages within both. Viability of the packages, tested by confronting with the opposing entity, illustrated the ways in which both narratives adapt under the changing circumstances. Out of the three key frames of the Russian narrative — historical and military significance of Crimea, geopolitization and sacralization

— the first one receives the most media presence in the first years following the annexation. The packages within the historical and military significance frame (such as the *reuniting* package) show viability within the Russian media sphere; however, they prove to be more fragile when faced with the competing narrative and factual arguments. Throughout the years following the annexation, Russian narrative takes a dramatic change towards normalizing Crimea as a part of Russia and seemingly doubling down on its previously charged rhetoric regarding Ukraine.

Ukrainian narrative operates within one key frame: best defined by the minimalistic *Crimea is Ukraine* slogan, it derives from the basis of international law and uses packages meant to directly contradict its Russian opponent (for instance, the *annexation* package as opposed to the Russian *reuniting*). Some of the elements within the narrative have no direct competition within the Russian narrative (the Crimean Tatar package being the main example), and thus present the post-colonial, rather than anti-colonial, rhetoric. In recent years, Ukrainian narrative has taken a turn towards solidifying its claim, with legislative measures protecting the status of Crimean Tatars as native population of Crimea among many others.

Our assumption that the evolution and transformation of packages does not only occur in each separate narrative but rather in response to each other was confirmed by the intertwining nature of the two narratives, with the Ukrainian rhetoric presenting a counterpoint or a competing point of view to the Russian narrative, and vice versa. Thus, we can affirm that whenever the artificial limitations are being set by censorship, the competing point is bound to emerge in the competing narrative (reuniting vs annexation etc).

The ongoing evolution of the two narratives and their competing nature present a field of potential future research in the sphere of narrative, heritage, memory and identity, centered around Crimean contested identities set to the background of the two competing narratives of Russia and Ukraine.

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