

OLENA NEDOZHOGINA

Identity construction of Russian-speaking  
Ukrainians after 2013–2014



DISSERTATIONES DE MEDIIS ET COMMUNICATIONIBUS  
UNIVERSITATIS TARTUENSIS

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## LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

**Study I.** Nedozhogina, O. (2019). A Bitter Divorce: Narratives of Crimean Annexation and their Relation to Larger State Identifications. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 71(7), 1069–1090.

**Study II.** Nedozhogina, O. (2019). Redrawing symbolic boundaries after Maidan: identity strategies among Russian-speaking Ukrainians. *National Identities*, 1–19.

**Study III.** Nedozhogina, O. (2019). Digital media practices in a conflict setting: Ukraine after the Maidan. *Central European Journal of Communication*, 12(3).

## AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

All three studies were conceived, designed, conducted and written by the author.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Ukraine came into the spotlight of public and academic interest as a site of rapid nation-building after the events of 2013–2014. Then, a series of civic protests (dubbed ‘The Revolution of Dignity’) led to the ousting of the pro-Russian president, a change in government and a shift in foreign policy orientation towards the European Union. This created significant tensions in the entangled relationship between Ukraine and Russia, which ultimately resulted in the Russian Federation unlawfully annexing a region of Ukraine, the Crimean Peninsula, and engaging in an outbreak of violence in eastern Ukraine on the side of separatist forces.

Thus, Ukraine has become a site of conflict, and this conflict has largely been interpreted in the tradition of previous research on Ukrainian identity. Most authors have analysed the situation in the disputed regions of Ukraine (Crimea and the east) in structuralist terms: as an ethnic conflict generated by the tension between Ukrainian and Russian interlinked structures (economic, political and historical entanglement, and the widespread use of the Russian language) and power competition, in particular between the Ukrainian-speaking and the Russian-speaking regions (Giuliano, 2018; Lutz, 2017).

On the other hand, some authors (Arel, 2018; Kulyk, 2014, 2016; Kuzio, 2015b, 2015a) have focussed on the changes in Ukraine’s national identity discourse<sup>1</sup> as a result of the conflict. They propose that the Ukrainian narrative of the national identity<sup>2</sup> has become more widely accepted in the polarised context, while regional and supra-national (Slavic and Soviet) identity narratives have subsided (Kulyk, 2017). This has happened as a result of the distancing of Ukraine from Russia in various spheres and levels (Kuzio, 2015b, 2015a). Some researchers state that Ukrainian and Russian national identity narratives have become more ethnocentric, focused on specific group characteristics, e.g. shared language and culture (Teper, 2016), while others emphasise the civic and inclusive nature of the national identity narrative in Ukraine after the protests (Bureiko & Moga, 2019; Kulyk, 2018). At the same time, some studies point out that the Ukrainian society is still characterised by widespread use of the Russian language and the consumption of Russian media (Nikitina, 2020), and

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<sup>1</sup> De Celia et al. (1999) point to language and discourse as the main means through which distinct *imagined communities* of nations (Anderson, 1983, p. 133) are created and reproduced. The *national identity*, following De Celia et al. (1999), is the product that presents the community’s uniqueness and its values. This product is ‘constructed and conveyed using the means of language and discourse, predominantly in narratives of national culture’ (De Celia et al, 1999, p. 22).

<sup>2</sup> Patterson & Monroe (1998) define a *narrative* as ‘ways in which we construct disparate facts in our own worlds and weave them together cognitively in order to make sense of our reality’ (p.1). The narratives of national culture/identity are thus stories we tell about our nations. Bruner (1996) points out that the narratives of national history and culture often function as spaces of contestation (p.88).

there is evidence that the Ukrainian people are engaging in active sense-making when confronted with conflicting media narratives surrounding the conflict (Szostek, 2017).

To summarise, two main approaches to describing and explaining the changes in identity discourse in Ukraine have appeared since the start of the conflict. The first one is the structuralist and conflict theory-driven view, which emphasises power struggles and competition for resources, as well as structure prerequisites (linguistic diversity, political entanglement with Russia, issues of media ownership, and the larger conflict between Russia and the EU), as the primary causes of internal conflict in Ukraine. The other view, driven by the constructivist paradigm, shifts the focus to the changing national identity discourse in Ukraine, how the narrative of the national identity is being reformulated as a result of the conflict with Russia, and taken up by the population (both Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking). However, both of these views approach the issue of national identity in a top-down manner. My study, on the other hand, offers a historicised, bottom-up investigation of how national identity is being constructed and negotiated by the ordinary people on the basis of their everyday experiences in the context of the conflict outbreak in the social site of historically intertwined structures.

With this study, I want to address the puzzle of changes in the identity construction of Russian-speaking Ukrainians in the conflict context from the sociological and ethnographic perspectives. The studies focus on the parts of the Ukrainian population that, for the purposes of consistency, are referred to as ‘Russian-speaking Ukrainians’: current (or, in the case of Crimean residents, former) citizens of Ukraine who use Russian as their main language of communication. I leave the question of ethnic belonging, so often simplified in scholarly works on Ukraine, open, to show the interaction between local, regional, national and supra-national identifications. The study participants speak Russian and are largely rooted in the Ukrainian society, but their identifications tend to be fragmented and fall somewhere in between ‘ethnic Ukrainian’ and ‘ethnic Russian’.

The study is positioned at the intersection of sociology, political science, media studies and area studies, with the emphasis on sociology. Firstly, I want to offer a direct contribution to the empirical knowledge of modern Ukrainian studies by examining changes in national identity narratives and the construction of group boundaries by Russian-speaking Ukrainians after the events of 2013. I achieve this by engaging with personal identity narratives collected from in-depth interviews of the ordinary people that reflect the dynamic of changes in narratives and performances of national identity during the crisis.

More importantly, I want to address the lack of engagement with the concept of national identity in Ukraine and other post-communist societies in the ontological sense. Recent research has approached the topic of Ukrainian identity from ahistorical and essentialising positions, while in this study I want to de-abstract the concept of the identity of the subject and re-settle it in the particular time, social relations, institutional practices and collective memory that posed

the question, in other words to explore the identity of Russian-speaking Ukrainians ‘empirically and historically’ (Somers and Gibson, 1993, p. 25).

To achieve this goal, I have synthesised a theoretical framework that combines concepts of *ontological narrativity* and *symbolic boundaries*, which are useful for understanding changes in identity construction performed at the popular level, with *cultural trauma*, which is used to conceptualise changes in public discourse during turbulent social events. I have also employed the *transnationalism approach* to address the ambiguity of identity construction in conflict in the context of rising global mobility and the diversity of cultural practices in Ukraine. In this study, I am making a theoretical contribution to the body of knowledge on the identity construction of subjects in the context of conflict with a historically dominant imperial power (Morozov, 2013), by applying a novel theoretical framework that considers both the particular historical socio-cultural context and modern globalising trends.

This cover article is connected with three studies (**Study I**, **Study II** and **Study III**) conducted in 2016–2018 in de jure Ukraine (Crimea and Kyiv) with participants affected by the conflict. The studies employed qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews and interactive exercises) to examine narratives and strategies used by the Russian-speaking Ukrainians in the conflict context to construct and negotiate the boundaries of national identity. The bulk of the empirical data was collected in Crimea in 2016 and in Kyiv (with participants from various regions) in 2018 and focused on the different ways people narrated the events of 2013–2014 (**Study I** and **II**) and their (online) media use practices in the context of those events (**Study III**). The studies were connected with how the Russian-speaking Ukrainian population makes sense of the polarisation resulting from conflict and the different meanings attributed to their earlier established practices of speaking Russian and following Russian media. The study interprets the findings in the context of larger shifts in the Ukrainian national identity discourse.

The cover article is structured as follows. First, I present the **case study context**, which provides the necessary background to interpret my research results. Then I outline the **theoretical framework**, which supports the research questions and explains both the theoretical and empirical gaps that are addressed by my research. The next chapter outlines the **research question**, as well as the sub-questions that are explored in the three studies. I follow up with the **methodological framework** of the studies. I then proceed to present the **results**, followed by the **conclusions** and **discussion** chapters.

## **2. CASE STUDY CONTEXT**

Engaging with the process of national identity construction at the popular level requires an in-depth discussion of the historical, political, economic, societal and symbolic contexts of the case, which act as a complex background to the identity construction and negotiation processes that have happened among the Russian-speaking Ukrainians since the events of 2013–2014. This context helps justify the need for a new framework for studying identity construction, in post-communist and other societies, in the context of conflict. Based on the empirical case description, I will propose a reconceptualisation of the object of study – Russian-speaking Ukrainians’ identifications – that departs from previous approaches to studying the issue of Russian-speakers in Ukraine.

### **2.1. Political situation in Ukraine: 2013 and onwards**

Since regaining independence, Ukraine has been faced with the challenges of building a cohesive national identity narrative in the presence of two factors: widespread use of the Russian language and close political involvement with Russia in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union (Bureiko & Moga, 2019). These factors maintained their significance over the course of political developments in the 1990s and 2000s. Some authors have questioned the success of the Ukrainian (elite) nation-building project (Polese, 2011). Particular aspects of the historical development of some Ukrainian regions, as well as the Soviet legacy (e.g. policies of Russification and the mixing of ethnicities), created a specific socio-linguistic situation in independent Ukraine (Mitchnik, 2019), with divisions along several lines, and the rise of several ‘borderland’ regions with distinct hybrid and subliminal identities (Kuromiya, 2003, 2008). While the Russian language lost its role and associated status in Ukraine after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it remained widespread and blended seamlessly into various life spheres (Mitchnik, 2019); the Russian-speaking regions later emerged as poles of political power and vision in Ukraine. This runs counter to the narrative later perpetrated by Russia, which painted the Crimea and Donetsk/Luhansk regions as settlement areas of ‘ethnic Russian minority’ that needed protection against discrimination (Allison, 2014); in reality, Ukrainians and Russians became tightly intertwined, creating paradoxes for the nation-building project during later times of crisis.

Ukraine in the 1990s and 2000s was and still remains a country where the majority of inhabitants identify as Ukrainian (according to the last national census in 2001, 77%), with about 17% identifying as ‘ethnic Russian’. According to a poll conducted by the Razumkov centre (2017), 68% of the population considers Ukrainian their mother tongue, 14% considers it to be Russian, and 17% both Ukrainian and Russian. However, the linguistic divisions do not coincide with the ethnic group boundaries, as large shares of the population either speak Russian in everyday life out of habit or necessity (often in industrial

workplaces and urban areas, which is a legacy of Soviet Russification), speak both languages interchangeably or use a colloquial mix of Ukrainian and Russian (*surzhyk*). In other words, language use in Ukraine is fragmented and fluid, and offers limited insight into subjects' self-identifications. What matters is not which language somebody speaks, but why they speak it, and where (which region) they come from (Kulyk, 2017).

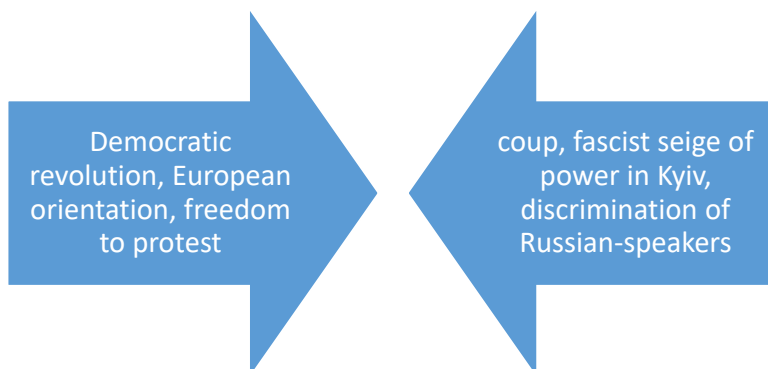
In the course of the political developments of the 1990s a symbolic division crystallised between the overwhelmingly Russian-speaking eastern regions, with strong industry from Soviet times and ties to Russia, and the overwhelmingly Ukrainian-speaking western regions, with strong cultural foundations and a general orientation towards the European Union. This tension, fuelled by opposing views of Ukraine's foreign policy, as well as its memory politics, produced two major political poles: the 'Party of Regions' (led by V. Ianukovych, with a strong base in the eastern regions) and 'Our Ukraine' (led by V. Iushenko, with a leaning towards Ukrainian nationalism).

In 2004, the events of the Orange Revolution had a pro-Western candidate become president ('Our Ukraine'), while the pendulum swung in the opposite direction when a pro-Russian candidate from the 'Party of Regions' (Viktor Ianukovych) won the elections in 2010. This dynamic defined the internal political discourse in Ukraine throughout the 2000s: politically active, EU-oriented, Ukrainian speaking, 'nationalist' western regions (the symbolic 'West') vs. mainly apolitical, well-off<sup>3</sup>, industrial Russia-oriented and predominantly Russian-speaking eastern regions (the symbolic 'East'), with Crimea (overwhelmingly Russian-speaking) remaining a peripheral (not so well off) region with a special/strategic status (the location of the Black Sea Fleet) and not much political influence. Of course, this picture is oversimplified: the language and ethnic dynamics were far more complex and not geographically bound, underlying economic interests heated up the 'identitarian' memory debates, and topics of ethnicity and national identity were exploited in the media controlled by various political forces. All of this came to a head in the winter of 2013, when President Ianukovych's unpopular decision to back out of the Association deal with the EU led to mass protests (dubbed 'Euromaidan' or 'Maidan' or 'The Revolution of Dignity') in multiple Ukrainian cities, soon turning violent in Kyiv. The Maidan protests led to the ousting of the president and a change in government in 2014. Various grass-roots movements and activists of Maidan joined the new establishment, or at least gained notoriety, such as the 'Right Sector' (*Praviy sektor*), a nationalist para-military party.

The rise of far-right movements and the revival of a Ukrainian nationalist agenda, though still marginal in the political discourse, was exploited in the Russian media, framing protest events as a 'fascist coup' and alleging possible violations of the rights of Ukrainian Russian-speakers (living mostly in the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine).

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<sup>3</sup> Even after the start of fighting in 2014, the Donetsk oblast remained second in salary growth after the capital (Kyiv), according to O. Kramar (2019) in *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia* (calculations based on state statistics): <https://tyzhden.ua/Economics/234522>



**Figure 1.** *Competing framings of the Euromaidan events.*

While the political situation was unstable in Ukraine, in the context of Ukrainian and Russian media producing opposing narratives, two major events occurred: firstly, Russia annexed Crimea in March 2014 (as a result of an internationally unrecognised referendum); secondly, separatist movements surged in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in April 2014, resulting in a proclamation by the unrecognised Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR), with the support of Russia. Both actions were justified by the Russian Federation by the desire to 'protect ethnic Russian speakers' from repression by 'nationalising' Ukraine (Allison, 2014). The events of the Revolution of Dignity, Crimean annexation and the outbreak of hostilities in the east, as reflected in popular narratives, are at the centre of **Studies I and II**.

Russia has been implicated in both of these major geopolitical developments: conducting information warfare in the media largely consumed in southern/eastern regions, pursuing creeping intervention followed by a quickly organised referendum in Crimea, and supplying separatist forces in Donetsk and Luhansk with armaments (Allison, 2014). In the rhetoric preceding the annexation of Crimea, the issue of Russian-speaking inhabitants of Ukraine was framed in terms of an identifier for an ethnic Russian minority, part of the *Russian world* (Feklyunina, 2016).

On the other hand, the Russian language was seen and framed in the public debate as a threat to the Ukrainian language and Ukraine's national unity even before the turbulent events of 2013–2014: debates on the status of Russian as a potential second state language continued through the presidencies of the 2000s, fuelling political polarisation<sup>4</sup>. In 2012, during the presidency of Viktor Yanukovych, the Parliament adopted a new version of the 'Bases of the state language policy' law, as a result of which Russian became a second official language (used in public affairs, education etc.) in 18 regions of Ukraine<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Poltavec (2017) The Language Law. *Social Communications Research Centre*, accessed from: [http://www.nbuv.gov.ua/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2753:movnij-zakon&catid=8&Itemid=350](http://www.nbuv.gov.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2753:movnij-zakon&catid=8&Itemid=350)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

During the conflict, the law received significant pushback: in 2017 a new draft bill ('On state language') was registered, which stated that the '*...Ukrainian language is a decisive factor and the main identifier for the Ukrainian national identity which formed historically and has for many centuries existed on its ethnic territory...*'<sup>6</sup>. This bill was not ratified; instead, as of April 2019, a new Language Law entered into force: its main provisions are the mandatory use of the Ukrainian language in all areas of the public sphere (public administration, the service sector, medicine etc.), and also at *all levels of education and media* (including online resources, printed media, cinema etc.)<sup>7</sup>. The Ukrainian Minister of Culture emphasised that 'the question of the Ukrainian language is a question of everyday self-improvement, of forming one's language identity' and 'the Ukrainian language is one of the foundations of Ukrainian statehood'<sup>8</sup>.

The rhetoric of these legislative acts shows the tension present in the public debate: the use of the Russian language in particular settings and the consumption of Russian language media are framed as threats to Ukraine's national identity, unity and, possibly, its sovereignty. The overall post-conflict normative context resulted in attempts to 'roll back' the spread of the Russian language in Ukraine and exclude it from life spheres deemed essential for the 'integrity' of national identity (public administration, education and media).

Other aspects of the securitisation of the Russian language and Russian-media consumption include banning more than 100 Russian TV and radio channels, series etc. since 2014, and a 2017 ban on the most widely used social network in Ukraine, the Russian-origin V Kontakte, on the search engine Yandex, on the server Mail.ru and on the social network Odnoklassniki (Sliesarieva, 2020). Another legislative development that happened in the wake of the conflict and is now seen as a significant symbolic step away from Russia involves the 'De-Communisation Laws' of 2015, which entailed the removal of Soviet-era memorials, renaming Soviet toponyms, and other prescriptive measures related to memorialising the Second World War, actions which run counter to the strictly prescribed Russian 'Great Patriotic War' narrative (Kozysrska, 2016). The narratives and communicative strategies accompanying the use of Russian media in the context of media bans in Ukraine are at the centre of **Study III**.

What also reflects the essentialisation and securitisation of questions of identity, and specifically Ukrainian national identity, is the increased interest in sociological polls. The 2017 Gorshenin Institute's poll was widely featured and celebrated in the media; its results showed that 92% of the population identified

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<sup>6</sup> Проект Закону України 'Про державну мову' від 19 січ. 2017 р. № 5670. URL: [http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4\\_1?pf3511=60953](http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=60953)

<sup>7</sup> Solonyna E. (2019) Radio Svoboda, accessed from: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29903678.html>

<sup>8</sup> E.Nishiuk, 2019, in the communique reprinted by Radio Svoboda, accessed from: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29795878.html>

as ‘ethnic Ukrainians’<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, a 2016 poll of the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology reported its results on the same topic (‘what ethnicity do you identify with?’) by introducing categories of ‘monoethnic Ukrainians’, ‘bio-ethnic Russo-Ukrainians’ and ‘monoethnic Russians’ (Kyy, 2017) in an effort to make sense of existing hybridity in Ukraine. It doesn’t help that the Russian word *natsionalnost* can be understood as ethnicity and/or nationality. A general conclusion of a review of polls is that Ukrainian Russian-speakers are indeed ‘shedding’ Russian identity and moving towards identifying with the national Ukrainian narrative (Kulyk, 2018). This only reflects the fact that boundaries between these two groups have been porous and mobile, so much so that certain populations have arguably shifted their identifications from one to another.

To conclude, the above cited evidence suggests that several parallel processes are taking place in post-2014 Ukraine: firstly, there are public level efforts to consolidate and formalise the Ukrainian national identity by appealing to some essentialist categories (e.g. language and history), which problematise the use of the Russian language and Russian media consumption in many life spheres. Secondly, public efforts to ‘make sense’, ‘name’ and reframe in more concrete terms and boundaries the ambivalent nature of Russian-speaking Ukrainians are taking place. Thirdly, a similar process of negotiation and re-conceptualisation of self-identities and boundaries is happening on the public level among Russian-speaking Ukrainians in response to comprehensive social change.

## **2.2. Changes in the media system and status of the Russian language in Ukraine in the context of conflict**

The issue of media, language and its relation to identity in Ukraine remains contentious. On the one hand, following the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the conflict in the Donbass (2014), the public narratives of Ukraine and Russia became violently opposed to each other (Hutchings & Szostek, 2015). This struggle manifested itself in the media-scape as well, with more than 100 Russian channels, TV and radio programmes, as well as the main social networks VKontakte and Odnoklassniki, the email service Mail.ru and the Yandex search – all of Russian origin – being banned in Ukraine in 2017 (Sliesarieva, 2020).

On the other hand, most of the banned sources are either available through satellite television (channels), the internet (films and TV series) or VPN services (platforms). Therefore, the resources were made less accessible, but not completely eliminated from the lives of the population. Table 1 summarises scattered data about media usage in Ukraine before and after the crisis erupted (2014) and the ban was introduced (2017).

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<sup>9</sup> The ‘Ukrainian Society and European Values’ survey was conducted in April-May 2017 by the Gorshenin Institute in cooperation with the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation in Ukraine and Belarus. Accessible at: <https://www.unian.info/society/2208576-over-92-of-ukrainian-citizens-consider-themselves-ethnic-ukrainians-survey.html>



**Table 1. Traditional and digital media in Ukraine**

<b>Traditional media and general trends</b>		
	BEFORE 2013–2014 (CONFLICT)	AFTER 2014
Share of newspapers in the Russian language out of total newspaper circulation****	61.5%	61.5%
Russian language magazines out of total magazine circulation****	85.6% (2014)	62.6% (2016)
Russian language on leading TV channels, share of total air time****	50.3% (2013)	34.4% (2016)
<b>Digital media</b>		
	BEFORE 2017 (BAN)	AFTER 2017
Users of Ukrainian internet (domain .ua), share of the general population*	Approx. 23%; the Kyiv oblast is among the highest (60%), while among the lowest are the Donetsk obl. (5%) and Crimea (2.8%) (2009)	64.7% (2017)*
Russian origin websites in the Top 10 most popular resources in Ukraine**	3–4 Russian resources – Vkontakte (#2), Yandex Ukraine (#5), Odnoklassniki (#7), Mail.ru (#8) – 2016 **	1 Russian resource – Vkontakte (#4) (2018)***
Vkontakte coverage of Ukrainian internet (domain .ua)	50% of users**	30.8% of users****
Odnoklassniki coverage of Ukrainian internet (domain .ua)	22.3% of users**	17% of users*****
Interface language in Facebook among Ukrainian users		75% – Russian language 19% – Ukrainian language 6% – Other (2016)**
Share of population using Vkontakte (monthly) as of 2017		Approx. 33% *****

\*Association of Ukrainian Internet 2018,

\*\*Les Belyi (2016) Ukrainian language online

\*\*\*Alexa rating for 500 Top websites

\*\*\*\*Taras Shamaida (2016) – Yearly monitoring of the Ukrainian language

\*\*\*\*\*TNS Ukraine 2018

Overall, the role of the Russian language has been diminishing in the media scape, but not drastically. Some Russian resources have lost their share of coverage due to the ban; on the other hand, the spheres of entertainment, consumption and communication are still dominated by the Russian language. In spite of restrictions, a third of the Ukrainian internet users still access VKontakte monthly<sup>10</sup>. The Russian language still plays a significant role in the Ukrainian digital media sphere, which means that, despite the conflict with Russia, the socio-technical system still supports hybrid and heterogeneous media practices. The impact of these hybrid practices (and hybridity in general) on the narratives and performances of national and civic identity is what drives my investigation into the media practices of the Russian-speaking Ukrainians in Study III. I interpret changes in the media landscape as shifts in the normative and institutional context, and in the configuration and systems of the reproduction of practices that themselves lead to the emergence of new practices, new configurations and, hence, new norms (Shove et al., 2015). Study III examines the tension created by clashes between ‘old’ and ‘new’ practices and how they are interpreted in the changed normative context.

To focus on the topic of identifications and interaction between various concepts on the ground level in different regions in Ukraine, and in the changed social and media context, I provide an overview of the previous research on the topic of Russian-speaking Ukrainians’ identity, and outline possible improvements in terms of conceptual lenses used to investigate the subject.

### **2.3. Changing conceptualisations of Russian-speaking Ukrainians’ identity**

Ukrainian identity building and the role of Russian-speakers in this process is a topic that aroused interest among scholars after the collapse of the Soviet Union (in the mid-1990s), and again after the events of 2013–2014. At the same time, this scholarly interest sometimes produced conflicting results, and the whole picture of Russian-speakers’ identity – vis-a-vis identity-building in independent Ukraine – remains rather blurred.

The most important factor to take into account, before approaching the literature on Ukrainian identity building, is that the way Ukrainian identity is performed in the Ukrainian context at times challenges the clear distinction between ‘Ukrainian’ and ‘Russian’ often presupposed by Western scholars studying nation-building and ethnic relations in the post-Soviet region. Reflecting the interchangeable use of two languages in everyday life, and, prior to the conflict, the abundance of strong regional and local identifications, the

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<sup>10</sup> Reported by hromadske.ua for June 2017, compared to 76% of users for May 2017 (before restrictions were introduced). Accessed from: <https://hromadske.ua/posts/tri-roki-bez-vkontakte-skilki-ukrayinciv-use-she-koristuyutsya-socmerezhami-rf>

Ukrainian context and its identity practices require a more nuanced approach (Bilaniuk & Melnyk, 2008; Janmaat, 2007; Kulyk, 2001).

The situation of Russian-speakers cannot be understood outside of the Ukrainian nation-building context. Wolczuk (2000) demonstrates that while the majority of scholars treat the Ukrainian identity nexus as a simple division into a Ukrainian ‘majority’ and Russian-speaking ‘minority’, the truth is that neither group is homogeneous. By the early 1990s, three groups emerged: Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians (44%), Russian-speaking Ukrainians (30%) and Russians (22%) (Wolczuk, 2000). But this, to complicate the situation even further, does not take into account completely bilingual Ukrainians or Russified Ukrainian-speakers. Linguistic and cultural borders between Ukrainians and Russians became extremely permeable, and, at the same time, arguably, no self-aware groups of Ukrainophones or Russophones emerged (Wolczuk, 2000). Additionally, being part of the Soviet Union ‘diluted’ the Ukrainian national idea and replaced it with the narrative of a ‘common statehood of Russia and Ukraine (Rus)’, which led to the fact that, despite successfully gaining independence, the Ukrainian population arguably failed to produce a strong sense of ‘imagined community’, at least in the period of the 1990s–2000s (Shevel, 2002; Wolczuk, 2000).

Other scholars have addressed the power structure of identities and language use in Ukraine, which also reflects the complex situation of Ukrainian nation-building. For more than two decades of independence, the Russian language has remained the ‘language of convenience’ and everyday communication, while Ukrainian has been the ‘language of defiance’ (Wylegała, 2010). Bilaniuk & Melnyk (2008) note that Ukrainian is still seen sometimes as a ‘backward’ language of peasants, with the majority of big cities being dominated by Russian, and the pressure to conform to Russian being especially strong in the workplace. Ryabchouk (1999) added to this picture by stating that Ukrainian Russian-speakers usually are quite supportive of Ukrainian nationhood and territorial integrity, but resent the enforced use of the Ukrainian language and culture. This explains the difference in national poll results (2017), as people may change their identifications (Ukrainian and/or Russian) depending on the way the question is asked.

The most recent pre-conflict investigation of identity narratives in Ukraine was made by Korostelina (2013): she looked into the political elite visions of Ukrainian national identity and identified five separate narratives: (1) dual identity, (2) being pro-Soviet, (3) a fight for Ukrainian identity, (4) a recognition of Ukrainian identity, and (5) a multicultural-civic concept. The main points of contention among the narratives (excluding the civic one) was the question of how much salience should be given to the common Ukrainian-Russian heritage (Kievan Rus), what the main difference between Ukraine and Russia is, and how much of the Russian language should be permitted into the public sphere (Korostelina, 2013).

An apparent shift in approaching the question of Russian-speakers’ identities in Ukraine occurred after the start of the conflict in 2014. A study by Kulyk

(2017) proposed that ‘the link between identity and language has been broken’ for Russian-speaking Ukrainians. Kulyk (2014), in his explorations of narratives of Ukrainian nationalism in 2013–2014, underscored its deeply inclusive nature and the embracing of Russian-speaking citizens. He further proceeded to conclude that now the border between Ukrainian and Russian identities is not linguistic/ethnic, but political: despite the deep alienation of Ukrainian Russian-speakers (which constitute, depending on the definition, up to 40% of the population) from the Russian people and Russia as a state, they continue to use Russian in everyday life, while still being loyal to Ukrainian nationhood (Kulyk, 2014). Kulyk, as well as other scholars, has devoted significant attention to understanding whether the foundation of the post-2014 Ukrainian identity is ethnic or civic. Quantitative (a 2015 survey) and qualitative (focus groups) research has demonstrated that the salience of the Ukrainian national identity became stronger (as opposed to other identities), and the embrace of state nationalism (symbols, etc.) grew, but the narratives accompanying these processes were deeply conflicting (pride vs. helplessness) (Kulyk, 2016, 2017). A recent study on the narratives of war and the credibility of news in Ukraine demonstrated that the population is still divided by opposing narratives (pro-Ukraine vs. pro-Russia) and, with the trust in news being very low, the support for these narratives depends not on diverse media practices, but on prior identifications (Szostek, 2017).

Other recent studies (Kulyk, 2017, 2018) on the narratives of Ukrainian-ness and identifications of Russian-speakers demonstrated that while the most widespread definition of ‘what it means to be Ukrainian’ is the one based on citizenship, the percentage of people choosing ‘both Ukr/Rus’ as their nationality reaches up to 20% in southern and eastern regions of Ukraine.

Knott (2018), in her discussion of peripheral, ‘borderline’ regions of Ukraine, suggests that the same questions mentioned above did not – up until 2014 and the conflict-induced polarisation – actually matter to the people living there. Knott’s (2018) proposition is that it was possible for the residents of peripheral regions (Crimea and the Donbas) to think of themselves as belonging to both ‘Ukraine’ and ‘Russia’ at the same time: in other words, the categories of Ukrainian and Russian nationalities were not mutually exclusive before 2014. Based on the example of Crimea, Knott (2018) suggested that the reason for this collapse of symbolic boundaries was the fact that Ukrainians and Russians could effectively behave as common actors in the peripheral regions, and did not encounter in their everyday life situations that encouraged them to perform their nationality.

But beginning in 2013–2014 researchers assume that the situation became more complex. On one hand, hybridity practices are supported by a proliferation of multiple ambivalent identities among titular Ukrainians (‘Western-Ukrainian’, ‘Eastern-Ukrainian’, ‘Russian’, ‘Soviet’, ‘European’, ‘Slavic’, regional and city identities, all of them fused and distributed to various degrees across the population) (Rodgers, 2006). On the other hand, after the events of 2014, a common understanding is that Ukraine has been undergoing national consolidation, and

also that it has become a field of struggle between two competing nationalisms: Ukrainian Nationalism vs. East Slavic Nationalism (Kuzio, 2015b). Janmaat & Piattoeva (2007) noted that even in the 2000s tension was building up between discourses of civic citizenship, perpetuated by international organisations, and national consolidation in Ukraine and Russia. In addition, the deep crisis in relations between Ukraine and Russia suggests that a widespread hybridity of identification ('Ukraine as the Motherland and Russia as the Fatherland') is not supported any more by both societies' frameworks and, in fact, even the pre-crisis development of both countries was characterised by policies essentialising their division (K. Korostelina, 2011; Petro, 2014).

An exploration of the scholarly debate around Ukrainian and Russian-speaking Ukrainian identity uncovers tensions between Western narratives of nation building and civic engagement and the challenges of their application to post-Soviet states, especially to Ukraine. On one hand, after the interrupted nation-building of the Soviet era, many authors approve of national identity consolidation efforts, and see it as necessary for Ukraine's future. In these instances, Russian-speakers are often separated into a more distinct group, and resistance to accepting Ukrainian linguistic and cultural practices is emphasised. On the other hand, the current Western multiculturalist narratives lean more toward highlighting the inclusive, civic bases of national identity. When these lenses are applied to Ukraine, the fragmented nature of Russian-speakers' identities and the multiple and porous boundaries between groups are brought to light. Most recently, it seems, Ukrainian (Kulyk, 2017, 2018; Kuzio, 2015b) scholars have focused on re-incorporating Russian-speaking Ukrainians as a group into the national identity narrative and have, to some degree, attempted to de-securitise the issue of the Russian language. Other authors (e.g. Knott, 2018; and K. V. Korostelina, 2013) have taken a more constructivist view of the topic of Ukrainian identity performances and narratives, but have not engaged with specific popular constructions, or with their ontological elements, which I address in this research.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.1. Identity and ontological narratives

The concept that unites various elements of this study, as well as broadly informing engagement with the topic of group boundaries, loyalties and communication practices of the Russian-speaking Ukrainians in the conflict setting, is *identity*, as understood by the constructivist school of thought. When first introduced, the concept of identity was predominantly seen in primordial terms, as something set, self-evident and natural, stemming from regional differences and properties of locations (Jones, 1997; A. D. Smith, 1979, 1986, 1995, 1996, 1999; Stryker & Burke, 2000). The rise of constructivism shed a different light on the issues of ethnos and identity, arguing that both are more concerned with the representations and performances of ethnicity and connections to ‘imagined’ ethnic communities, rather than ethnic origin as such (Alba, 1990; Anderson, 2006; Gellner, 2008; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Moreover, identity is not only constructed and later performed by individuals, it also reflects complex hierarchies of status existing in societies at large. Claiming identification with a group and ascribing such identifications to others signify that there is social or political capital to be gained (Sen, 2007; Waters, 1990). Likewise, changes in identifications can result from new governmental policies, an increase in activism and other social changes (Nagel, 1994).

I strongly agree with Brubaker’s critique of the academic use of the concept of identity that despite the increase of constructivism in identity literature, in the majority of particular studies identity is still treated as something fixed and almost inescapable (Brubaker, 2004). The most common mistake of identity scholars (and, by extension, politicians) is seeing stable clear-cut groups where in reality there are none, or at least where more complicated mechanisms are operating, e.g. group dynamics, the influence of different discursive frames etc. (Brubaker, 2004). Thus, I share a post-modern take on the category of identity, which revolves around deconstructing discourses attached to the notion itself, especially to the fact that collective identities, especially ethnic ones, became a public matter (Sen, 2007; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Manipulation of the discourse surrounding ethnic identities is often linked to the interests of elites: the stakes they have in building the image of the Other and perpetuating the idea of a homogeneous nation (Anderson, 2006; Gellner, 2008).

This research engages with the processes of identity formation in a turbulent social context. Though it is generally agreed that identities are fluid and always in the process of negotiation, there is also an understanding that social change (e.g. war or colonisation) and ruptures to societal tissue produce immense impacts on identities, narratives (the stories groups tell about themselves and others), boundaries and performances. This is true for Ukraine in two ways: firstly, it is a country in a state of military conflict with a neighbouring state, but secondly, and more generally, it is a country with a Soviet legacy. Nationalism, as practised

by ‘new’ (post-communist) European states, has been viewed as a controversial, potentially dangerous phenomenon by scholars for some time. Although A. D. Smith (1999) has suggested that each new state has to undergo a phase of national consolidation, R. Brubaker has famously coined the term ‘nationalizing states’: states that in the process of active nation-building get inescapably trapped in the vicious cycle of accusatory rhetoric between constructed ‘minority groups’ and external homelands (Brubaker, 1995; Kuzio, 2002). More critical researchers, e.g. Wimmer & Glick Schiller (2002), suggest that this only shows how ubiquitous, invisible and self-explanatory the idea of a nation and having stable clear-cut national identities, especially in the Western sense, have become. The concept of a national identity, nationalising policies and the image of a ‘proper’ nation state have not only been forced upon societies undergoing social change, but have also been internalised by them (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002).

Engagement with the topic of identity in Ukraine and other post-Soviet societies has largely followed the same structuralist tradition (Arel, 2018; Onuch et al., 2018; Onuch & Hale, 2018). This research aims to address the fact that the topic of national identity in Ukraine has been addressed from ahistorical and essentialising positions, assuming experiences with national and ethnic categories similar to those in Western societies. Conversely, I propose to approach the topic from the ontological narrativity perspective outlined by Somers & Gibson (1993), offering a new perspective on the change in cultural order and the regime of everyday normalities in Ukrainian society.

Somers and Gibson’s (1993) call for the re-conceptualisation of identity studies is rather general, but it serves to support the underlying bases of my research. Somers and Gibson (1993, p. 13) advocate uniting identity formation studies with the sociology of action by ‘historicising’, situating in particular historical circumstances the core concepts of sociology, such as agency and identity, and diverting the attention of sociologists back to narratives. Furthermore, they call for ‘normalising’ the study of identity in the ontological sense, advocating that ‘we must reject the decoupling of action from ontology, and instead accept that some notion of social being and social identity is, willy-nilly, incorporated into each and every knowledge-statement about action, agency, and behaviour’ (Somers and Gibson, 1993, p. 4).

Following their suggestions, I study identity and narratives in relation to very universal categories, such as time, space and relationality (in addition to class, gender and race) and focus on the ‘narrativist understanding of social action and social agency – one that is temporal, relational, and cultural, as well as institutional, material, and macro-structural’ (Somers and Gibson, 1993, p. 5). I adopt their notion that the main categories for sociological analysis, agency, structure, identity etc., ‘...rest on the core of a historical “metanarrative” of classical western modernization ...’, and social theory in itself, by presuming about questions that need to be answered by studies of identity, nation, etc. intervenes in the narrative process of knowledge construction (Somers and Gibson, 1993, p. 10). Thus, in general, I support the authors’ call to de-abstract the

identity of the subject and re-settle it back in the particular time, social relations, institutional practices and collective memory that posed the question, in other words to explore identity ‘empirically and historically’ (Somers and Gibson, 1993, p. 25).

This is especially important for the context of this research and the identity-ontological challenges faced by the Ukrainian population with the necessity of responding to and negotiating the ahistorical essentialisation of the language in the context of conflict. This research can, in turn, be informative in helping social scientists today approach the intricacies of identity transformation while avoiding abstracting the categories of agency and identity and conceptualising them as ‘deviant’ in relation to systemic change. My research looks into how subjects maintain ontological integrity and security by performing agency in mundane everyday acts in a particular historical context and, therefore, contributes to the development of the historical-ontological analysis of social change.

At the core of the investigation of identity in the ontological sense is the focus on *ontological narratives*. Somers & Gibson (1993) talk about four levels of narrativity: public narratives, conceptual narratives, metanarratives and ontological narratives (pp. 30–33). The latter, also known as personal narratives, are ‘stories that social actors use [...] to make sense of their lives’ (Somers & Gibson, 1993, p. 30). Ontological narratives connect life events, using different narrativity features to embed ‘the identity and the self in time and spatial relations’ (p. 30). Ontological narratives exist on an inter-personal level (p. 31), but they are sustained and eventually transformed in the framework of larger webs of relationality and meanings, which Somers & Gibson (1993, p. 31) define as *public narratives*, of which the national identity narrative is one.

The conceptualisation of ontological narratives that are at the centre of this research also follows Somers and Gibson’s (1993) line of thinking, defining four features of reframed narrativity: ‘1) relationality of parts, 2) causal emplotment, 3) selective appropriation, and 4) temporality, sequence, and place.’ (1993, p. 27). In other words, ontological narratives work by connecting some parts (selective appropriation) of constructed configuration and/or networks of practices (relationality), giving symbolic significance to these connections (emplotment) and positioning them in chronological order (temporality, sequence and place). I pay specific attention, following Somers and Gibson’s (1993, p. 28) thought, to how ‘narrativity’ turns ‘events’ into abstracted episodes selected on some value-based prioritisation, whether or not the sequence of episodes is presented or experienced in anything resembling chronological order (emplotment and selective appropriation).

To conclude, the ontological narrativity perspective informs my general approach to the study of identity and narratives in a particular historical context (Ukraine and conflict). However, I supplement this general foundation with some additional concepts and perspectives that help flesh out particular aspects of identity formation in social change and in a society where conceptualisations of ethnic and national identities have, until recently, been vague and blurred. To that end, I add the symbolic boundaries framework to outline the mechanism of



border(s) construction that play an important part in ontological narratives and are reproduced in the everyday practices that underlie the processes of identity formation.

### 3.2. Symbolic boundaries

To continue in the constructivist tradition, I look at identity in the Ukrainian context through the lenses of *symbolic boundaries*, following Lamont's conceptualisation (Lamont, 1992). The original shift of focus from 'cultural differences' as the most influential factors in defining ethnic identities, to *borders* between groups and nations (Barth, 1969) signified an early shift from a structuralist to a constructivist understanding of identity (Eriksen, 2019). Barth's famous essay on 'Ethnic groups and boundaries' conceptualises the (re)production of ethnic groups and ethnic identity as an ongoing process of boundary-making that proceeds in inter-group communication. Therefore, he sees ethnic and national identity as a culturally rather enduring (but not pre-established) phenomenon emerging and changing in the course of negotiation and interaction between group members and groups.

Though Barth (1969) was the first to conceptualise ethnicity borders and the interactional ontology of ethnic identities, his general treatment of the subject was still more 'naturalist', as Eriksen (2019) posits: for him borders and different ethnic groups exist as a result of a common universal human feature to draw distinctions and, therefore, all borders are of a similar nature and thus comparable (Barth, 1969). The borders between groups are permeable, but the mechanism of differentiation and border creation remains discrete (Barth, 1969; Eriksen, 2019).

However, this study posits that the process of border construction and negotiation reveals more about the dynamic of relations between groups and states than just investigating where the borders lie, which is why I apply Lamont's (1992) conceptualisation of symbolic borders. She connected several aspects from the works of Durkheim ([1912]1965), Weber (1922) and Bourdieu (1984) on distinctions and groups: while for Durkheim (1912) symbolic distinctions between the sacred and profane functioned as unifying factors to create cohesive societies (Lamont et al., 2015), for Weber (1922) and Bourdieu (1984) they act as instruments for creating social inequality between classes, where 'cultural understandings about state boundaries have a strong impact on a person's social position and access to resources' (Lamont et al., 2015, pp. 850–851).

So, building on those interpretations, Lamont defines symbolic boundaries as 'the lines...that include some people...while excluding others' through various mechanisms, institutions and everyday practices, to ultimately create a constructed unity and/or to perpetuate inequality (Lamont, 1992; Lamont et al., 2015; Lamont & Molnár, 2002). According to Lamont (1992), they not only

help us understand and ‘map’ the outside world, but also serve as anchors for our self-perception, reinforcing our own identifications.

So, Barth stressed the interactional nature of identity and encouraged focusing on the processes and phenomena of interaction in researching identity and its transformation (instead of the study of such objective structural factors as mobility). Lamont (1992), in her work on ‘symbolic’ and ‘social’ boundaries, elaborated on Barthian views in order to balance the agency-structure role. Lamont has principally explained how the identity contributes through boundary-work to social structuration (in the Giddensian sense). In her work, there exist not only ‘symbolic boundaries’ that are distinctions between social groups defined by actors, but also ‘social boundaries’ that are structurally prescribed unequal affordances and accesses to resources and opportunities (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Symbolic boundaries are necessary factors in propelling social change, but only when they are widely accepted within a society. Only then are they able to initiate relevant changes to structure and become structurally embedded social boundaries.

According to these concepts, the situation in Ukraine is about change in not only symbolic boundaries, but also in social boundaries, because the access to resources (e.g. media and other limitations concerning language use) and social and political capital (the ability to influence public discourse, propose legislation, or even vote in the case of internally displaced persons) has been limited in specific ways during the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Russian-speakers face the problem of shifting a part of their everyday habits out of the legitimate regime of practices in the context of the Russian invasion and the re-definition of symbolic boundaries that may also bring about the danger that they transform into structurally supported social boundaries. Their management of symbolic boundaries and media and language use habits is critical (although the reactions of ethnic Ukrainians are also important) in deciding the formation of social boundaries in the new Ukraine.

Symbolic boundaries between ‘national’ spaces are arguably ‘thicker’ than other group boundaries, and modern societies are grounded in the national framework (Gellner, 2008), to the point where the category of nation has become ubiquitous and ‘invisible’ in research (Modarres, 2005). The borders between nations are not just objects in themselves; they reflect the power dynamics between and within states, shaping internal social practices and structuring interactions between individuals and groups (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). ‘National identity’ and its borders, in this sense, becomes an arena of struggle for power and control between competing discourses, while at the same time remaining an instrument of manipulation (Iedema, 1997; Iedema & Wodak, 1999; Muntigl et al., 2000).

The struggle inherent in the concept of national identity and symbolic borders manifests itself through various life spheres, of which language is one. ‘Language as a social practice’, as defined by Fairclough, (1995) and Fairclough & Wodak (1997), as well as the extra-linguistic context, are crucial in analysing ideological effects of practised discursive power relations (Wodak &

Meyer, 2001). Even mundane everyday acts of communication, which are a part of the focus of this research, are not only themselves products of specific societal conditions, but also dynamically uphold, shape and re-shape them. In the process of communicating, subjects construct or defy the existing symbolic order, and also determine their own positions in relation to it (Wodak et al., 2009).

In the case of Ukraine and Russia, as pointed out by Teper (2016) and Kuzio (2015b), an active re-negotiation of the national identity narratives is taking place. The power struggle in the identity construction in Ukraine and Russia concerns many spheres: ensuring support from various internal (and external) populations in the context of a military conflict, delineating, in fact, which populations are internal and which are external (e.g. Crimean inhabitants and dwellers of separatist-controlled regions in the Donbass), upholding/unsettling the symbolic hierarchy of the post-Soviet space (where Russia is usually seen as a 'strong actor', while Ukraine is a 'failed state'), securing support from the West (in the Ukrainian case), etc.

The re-negotiation of national identity is happening in the context of the transformation of previously 'blurred' group boundaries: as suggested by Shevel (2002), Wolczuk (2000) and, more recently, by Knott (2018), prior to 2014 constructions of 'Ukrainian' and 'Russian' identifications in the context of Ukrainian peripheries often overlapped, where in reality both categories collapsed and subjects acted as one. In addition, territorial, place-based identifications, especially in Crimea (**Study I**) and the eastern regions (**Study II**), have never lost their salience, although significant processes of de-terrorisation and politisation have taken place. A growing number of recent studies also support the assumption that Ukrainian public sphere actors have been active in reshaping the public identity discourse and in re-drawing the lines between what it means to be Ukrainian and Russian, as well as the imagined inter-relationship between the two communities (Kulyk, 2016, 2017, 2018; Kuzio, 2015a).

In the case of Russian-speakers in Ukraine, there was little effort to critically engage with the border-negotiation efforts. Even now, with the majority of scholars attempting to define new ways of operationalising ethnicity and identity in the Ukrainian context, the main focus still remains on finding the causal relationships between language/ethnicity and support for various policies (Arel, 2018; Onuch & Hale, 2018).

The aim of this research is to investigate the issue of border-construction and border-negotiation strategies in Ukraine, as performed by the Russian-speaking populations, in the turbulent social context. Even though it is assumed that identities and borders are in constant flux, an additional challenge is to incorporate the impact of a sudden social change and its possible implications into the development of the national identity narrative, which I address by including the concept of *cultural trauma*.

### 3.3. Cultural Trauma

Cultural trauma is a concept introduced to post-communist studies by Sztompka (2000a), though it was previously extensively used in anthropology and memory studies (Alexander, 2004; Alexander et al., 2004; Caruth, 2016; Eyerman, 2001). Cultural trauma is conventionally understood as a phenomenon of an undermined sense of commonality reflected in a unified narrative, which usually follows a subjectively (culturally) disruptive event or process (Sztompka 2000a, p. 452; Alexander et al. 2004, p. 29). Sztompka suggests that any social change, especially a rapid and unexpected one, creates a 'rip' in the tissue of collectivity of a given society, and any breakdown of a current cultural order is accompanied by 'disturbances in collective identity', 'identity crisis' and attempts to 're-establish, reshape and construct a new collective identity' (Sztompka 2000a, p. 459).

The use of the term trauma requires criteria as to what events can qualify as socially/culturally traumatic. My use of it in this research study, and particularly in the case of the annexation of Crimea, requires some explanation as well. The definition depends on the approach a researcher takes. At first, she can see trauma as a dire consequence of a potentially collectively traumatising event seen from the 'objective' perspective and perceiving the victims of trauma as being passive (Neal, 1998). Secondly, trauma can be conceptualised as a response to those potentially traumatising events and victims as active agents. Thirdly, trauma can be seen as a social space where coping with horrible events happens, whether constructively (leading to re-adaptation into society) or non-constructively (falling out of societal frameworks) (Caruth, 2016). Fourthly, trauma can be conceptualised as a claim that is made by a group in a society, a process of establishing victimhood and blaming perpetrators, and thus, in the end, it is a specific narrative shared by a community that plays a role in a public discourse (Alexander, 2004; Sztompka, 2000b, 2000a). Both Sztompka and Alexander contend that cultural trauma constitutes a disruption of the cultural foundation not only at the ideological level, but also at the level of norms, i.e. taken-for-granted ways of doing and thinking, when routinised behaviours become uncertain and hostile (Alexander, 2004; Sztompka, 2004). The important difference between Sztompka and Alexander is that for Sztompka cultural traumas are caused by external events that break social actors' routines, taken-for-granted beliefs and habits, i.e. 'dislocations in the routine, accustomed ways of acting or thinking' (Sztompka, 2004, p. 164). In explaining the resources and mechanisms actors use to overcome traumatic events or periods in history and achieve a new stabilisation of the social order, Sztompka's approach is predominantly structuralist-functionalist.

Alexander's (2004, 2013) approach is instead constructivist, where trauma is not caused by the event but by how people interpret the event and narrate it, negotiating the tension between 'old' and 'new' narratives. While for Sztompka cultural trauma is about externally caused change in the 'regime of practices' (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019), for Alexander the trauma is about changed cultural

hegemony (Alexander, 2004). While I acknowledge and draw somewhat from Alexander's (2004) definition, Sztompka's (2000a) interpretation of the impact of rapid change on collective identity and societal development, which I use in my research, fits better with the symbolic boundaries framework, which Sztompka partially implemented in addressing the impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union on the changing identifications and symbolic borders between 'Eastern' and 'Western' Europe in Polish society (Sztompka, 1996, 2000b).

His main interpretation of cultural trauma is that – whether outwardly interpreted as good or bad – all drastic social change produces cultural disorientation and a collective search for new cultural orienteers, what can also be re-conceptualised in Somers' and Gibson's (1993) words as the re-establishment of the subject's ontological security through the re-invention of disrupted identity narratives that re-frame everything, from understandings of agency and identity to everyday mundane practices in that particular society. Sztompka's treatment of the cultural trauma of social change as the physical-structural interruption of the existing social order is relevant, because the war with Russia transformed not only the political but also the economic, administrative, legal and media structures of Ukraine, not to mention the cultural hegemonies. The previous taken-for-granted institutional behaviour norms and practices have now been problematised in the course of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the individual and collective agents that against the new norms are sanctioned (i.e. the ban on Russian media channels). Thus the pre-2013 practices and interactions of the Ukrainian people that were formed as a result of their socialisation in the previous state of the social order came to be problematised, and their agency is becoming more institutionally prescribed/shaped (i.e. institutionalised and politicised). On the individual level, people who use the Russian language in certain social spheres and consume Russian media face both objective and perceived failures of everyday habitus. The perceived inadequacy of the habitus can lead to a number of possible individual responses (Sztompka 2004, p. 184–188).

According to Sztompka (2004), the ways of managing cultural trauma at the institutional and individual levels can be aimed both at achieving a change in the social order and at the maintenance of the old order, i.e. social inertia (Sztompka, 2004, p. 194). Individuals may or may not change habits and modify their self-identifications, institutions can support or hinder new and old social practices, and social movements carrying relevant ideas may or may not emerge. The social groups and institutions who are adherents of 'new' (i.e. those changing their media routines because of the ban) or 'old' cultural practices (i.e. those who continue the same routines of consuming Russian media) create tensions and clashes between themselves that, in turn, lead to changes in the whole cultural order of the given society and result in cultural transformation (Sztompka, 2004, p. 194).

Thus, in spite of having immediate negative consequences, cultural trauma can be a force for social becoming and can act as a catalyst for social consolidation or re-construction (Sztompka, 2000a, p. 464). I assume, following

this interpretation, that the disruption of existing ontological narratives can lead to the re-negotiation of identity elements and border configurations that were too radical before to be accepted by the public discourse.

I consider some of the criticism expressed by Kansteiner (2004) regarding the category of cultural trauma to be legitimate: he notes that it fetishises violence (by not explicitly differentiating between victims and perpetrators), diminishes real trauma (e.g. that of the Holocaust and slavery, from which this area of studies originated) and borrows too much from the psychology of individual trauma. I consider this criticism more relevant to previous works on collective trauma (e.g. Caruth 1996 and Neal 1998), while Sztompka, in his treatment of the concept, clearly makes a connection with the well-established tradition of studying the effects of social change on the societal level: Durkheim's (1897) anomie, Ogburn & Duncan's (1964) cultural lag, identity crisis literature (Merton, 1938), etc.

I assume that the event that arguably kicked off the processes of identity transformation – the Crimean annexation in its conjunction with the Revolution of Dignity (**Studies I and II**) – can be interpreted through the lens of the cultural trauma theory (Sztompka, 2000a), assuming that it acted as a disruptor for the various Ukrainian communities (especially given Knott's (2018) suggestion that the peripheral Ukrainian communities in Crimea and the east supported double/overlapping Ukrainian/Russian identities before the start of the conflict). Using narrative analysis and the assumption of Somers and Gibson (1993) that narratives are employed to restore subjects' ontological security in the event of disruption, I analysed the ways Crimean residents narrated the annexation to understand how the rapid political change prompted local residents to re-construct their understanding of the self and their connection to imagined national communities through narratives, as well as how these narratives tied in with the larger national identity discourse changes in Ukraine and Russia (**Study I**). On an individual level, applying Sztompka's concept made it possible to see the construction of alternative victim-perpetrator narratives that served as a basis for the new national identities that the Russian-speaking Ukrainian subjects had to adopt to re-root their understandings of themselves in the new social reality. The physical shifting of borders in Ukraine, which was largely interpreted as an act of violence, created the need for a re-conceptualisation of symbolic borders between the two states and various overlapping groups.

### **3.4. Transnationalisation of the bordered space**

While the concepts of symbolic boundaries and cultural trauma provide an almost complete lens to investigate changes in identity construction in the post-conflict space in Ukraine, one aspect requires additional discussion and conceptualisation. With the start of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, national borders shifted both physically and symbolically and, arguably, became less permeable. Where before group identities collapsed and people didn't encounter

borders on an everyday basis (Knott, 2018), suddenly they not only had to interact with state borders much more often (e.g. in the case of Crimean residents or internally displaced persons, by travelling across contested borders), but also faced securitisation of their previously ordinary practices, e.g. speaking Russian, consuming Russian-language media or having hybrid identifications. As before the borders were not emphasised, practices of a trans-border nature were 'invisible', while now that the existence of borders is actively communicated, people have to, as part of the re-negotiation of identifications in the context of social change, make sense of their individual trans-border practices.

Sztompka (2000a) emphasised that constructive coping with cultural trauma happens when collective identity is re-constructed using a narrative that alleviates inconsistencies, when a new clear interpretation is offered. However, in the globalised world, processes of nationalisation and transnationalisation exist side by side, and their interaction in the Ukrainian case is what makes the puzzle so complex. **Study III**, while building on the findings of **Studies I** and **II**, approaches changes in online media practices caused by the conflict-induced polarisation from the perspective of transnationalism, and how engaging in consuming media that comes from abroad and/or challenges the existing state narrative potentially either works to de-construct the notion of nationality or, in the context of the conflict, to produce a more inclusive civic narrative of the national identity.

There is a large body of literature that explores the impact of globalisation on the nation state and its institutions (e.g. Albrow, 1997; Carnoy, 2001; Carnoy & Castells, 2001; Sassen, 1996; Vertovec & Cohen, 2002). The authors' presumption is that while borders become more permeable and mobility grows, national identity and the power of state institutions wither (Vertovec, 2001). However, this is contested by many national identity/nationalism scholars, who, while acknowledging that the institutional frameworks might be changing, point out how our personal identifications and views on how world politics works are still deeply rooted in the idea of the nation state (e.g. Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002).

One of the attempts to understand how the nation state reacts to the transnationalisation of identities is through the dynamic nexus of 'identities-borders-orders' (Albert et al., 2001). According to the authors, any given nation state seeks to 'contain' the people within its territory (borders), and impose its institutions (order) and identity on them. Mobility challenges all three aspects of the nexus and disturbs the common narrative of the 'uninterruptedness' of the national identity (Vertovec, 2004).

However, more recent studies in the field show a shift in the understanding of transnationalism as something new and external to the state, something that happens *to* the state and is driven by migrants in a traditional sense. Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore (2018) note that migration studies, despite often using transnationalism as their framework, have retained a clear national focus; for many years the interaction between migrants/minority groups, the home state and the receiving state was at the centre of the debate (Parrado, 2017). The main

assumption is that migrants' transnationalism is based on simultaneous engagement in home and host countries, and can be both unbalanced and positively reinforcing of the host country's social cohesion (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013; Tsuda, 2012). The connection between citizenship and transnationalism, explored by such authors as Couldry et al. (2014), Lewicki (2017), Lewicki & O'Toole (2017) and Muller (2004), depicts how the discourse of civic activity is being reshaped by those holding multiple loyalties and identities. However, the main point is that these studies assume that there is a clear majority within the state to which the transnational minority does – or does not – assimilate; it is assumed that both a lack of assimilation and full assimilation affect the 'core' culture.

However, the lens of transnationalism was subjected to critical reflection as soon as it was conceptualised. Vertovec (2007) called for abandoning the focus on a specific minority group's engagement with the 'home-country' and focusing on the larger state of *super-diversity*. Super-diversity is the multidimensional complexity that occurs when different diversities (ethnic, legal, social, economic, political, religious etc.) intersect (Grillo, 2015). But if groups of populations become super-mobile, globalised and subject to these intersecting differences, the ensuing conclusion is that it is not only migrant communities, but in fact *all* communities, to a greater or lesser degree, that are profoundly affected by globalisation and are transnational in differing ways. Hence, in many cases there isn't a coherent majority culture to which the minority should assimilate (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018). In fact, the whole distinction between a minority/majority, us/them, sending/receiving state is missing the nuance of socio-economic, cultural and demographic complexity that exists in modern societies (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018). The recent transnational approach involves looking at practices that cross state borders and groups enacting them, taking into account the local context (Redclift & Rajina, 2019), as well as levels of education, language, gender, legal status (in different combinations, individually/intersectionally) as expressions of social capital that group members may or may not have access to (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018).

### 3.5. Media use in practising transnationalism

In the last couple of years, the main focus in transnationalism studies has firmly shifted to examining the interplay and mutual reinforcement of transnational practices and digital media. This came about as a result of understanding that new forms of media play an equal, or perhaps bigger, role in the lives of people with 'multiple loyalties', in comparison with mobility itself (Andersson, 2013).

For that reason, online media, as an important vessel for national identity construction, is at the centre of **Study III**, following Anderson's conceptualisation of nationhoods as 'imagined communities': common virtual constructs that unite people who otherwise don't know each other through information-spreading technologies, state commemorative practices etc. (Anderson, 2006). However,



in the context of rising mobility, the porousness of borders/information, and the *super-diversity* discussed above (Vertovec, 2007), national identity narratives are becoming increasingly negotiable, and the negotiation happens in a space where physical borders are non-existent and multiple group identities have many more opportunities to engage in direct interactions. That's why it's assumed that media practices that are cross-border/hybrid in nature might lead to the loosening of identities and the construction of multiple identities that do not fit discourses perpetuated by respective nation states, and that, in fact, break out of the national framework (Aksoy & Robins, 2002; Vertovec, 2001). In **Study III**, I focused on how the national identity is being re-negotiated and reproduced via micro-level digital practices in the context of a hybrid media system, as well as under the influence of conflict-induced polarisation.

The focus on practices fits well with my research's overall concern with social change, as I follow the view of Shove et al. (2012) that systems of social practice 'hold society together' and are important objects of study in times of transition (p. 3), as practices are simultaneously shaped by the norms and institutions of a particular society and reproduce them, being both indicators and agents of change (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). For the purpose of investigating the behaviours outlined in Study III, I adopted Reckwitz's (2002) definition of practice as a 'routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, "things" and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. A practice ... depends on the existence and specific inter-connectedness of these elements, and ... cannot be reduced to any one of these single elements' (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249). According to the social practices theory approach, social practices are collectively shared and recognisable entities (Shove et al., 2012, 2015), and although individuals are carriers of practices in abstract terms, they perform them in their somewhat unique ways, and the practices vary according to situational contexts (Cetina et al., 2005; Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki & Schatzki, 1996). Integrated elements of practices include material objects, visuals and skills, and are partly autonomous, partly constituted by all other practices which consist of the same elements (Shove et al., 2015). Social practices are reproduced by multiple circuits of reproduction, changing through new configurations formed as a result of new emerging forms of inter-dependence between elements, and co-requisite relationships between practices (Shove et al., 2012). Practices form bundles of practices (Schatzki, 2002). The lens of social practice theory enables one to analyse human actions in a comprehensive manner (both material and immaterial aspects) and in relation to the social structural context: not in a deterministic, but in a performative way that fits with the constructivist framework of this research.

As regards social practices in the media domain, departing from the usual tradition of media content-centred research, I had to move away from media texts and instead focus on practices, or, 'what are people actually doing in relation to media?' (Couldry, 2012). Couldry created the concept and provided a

general definition of media-related practices as an ‘open-ended range of practices directly or indirectly related to, or oriented around media’ (Couldry, 2012, p. 33), but no practical mapping of media practices has been produced so far. The way people engage in and describe their practices can show larger patterns of power relations inside the society and competition between currently dominant narratives of ‘proper’ self-representation. Some researchers of digital transnationalism think that the internet does not function as a virtual space where people engage in cultural syncretism; rather, they see it as a deliberate tool used to create and share meaning (Skop & Adams, 2009). The practices associated with this ‘tool’ are therefore examined in **Study III**.

The goal of the research and, in particular **Study III**, was to explore the dynamics of identity reproduction and re-negotiation through types of narration of media practices under conflict circumstances. The larger aim was to observe the interaction between transnational media practices and innovativeness: attempts to re-negotiate existing national identity narratives, practices and conceptualisations of state institutions.

For the purposes of the research, the transnational media practices are defined based on a more general tension outlined by Couldry (2012) between keeping channels open (hybridity/heterophily) and screening out (homophily), as engaging with/producing content and activities that originate from countries other than Ukraine or from occupied/uncontrolled territories (Crimea and parts of the Donbass), or which in any other way refer to ‘foreign’ elements in the public discourse of Ukraine. Transnational media/cultural practices (e.g. uniting elements of ‘Ukrainian’ and ‘Russian’, using languages interchangeably in creating posts, or bringing elements from the ‘other side’, e.g. pictures/news from occupied territories, into the discourse) can be considered to challenge the state narrative in the context of conflict and active nation-building. Homophily, conversely, is conceptualised as limiting engagement with cross-border and/or challenging content, as well as maintaining practices of engagement with homogeneous (in a cultural sense) content (e.g. unsubscribing from groups/content creators from Russia, switching to Ukrainian (the national language) in content creation etc.).

The ‘allure of homophily’ (Gu et al., 2014) is that people often seek familiarity/reassurance through their online practices. On the other hand, researchers have consistently associated heterophily with civic engagement, and it is generally accepted that more diverse and issue-oriented media practices lead to higher levels of civic engagement (for an overview, see Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2012)). At the same time, it has been demonstrated that while transnational communities tend to construct their news consumption from multiple sources, ‘like a puzzle’, this does not often lead to taking up alternative narratives (Szostek, 2017, 2018b, 2018a; Vihalemm & Juzefovičs, 2020). Therefore, the influence of the conflict context on the way users engage in and rationalise transnational media practices, as well as the impact of heterogeneity on the civic identity narrative, are examined in this research.

### **3.6. (Re)conceptualising Russian-speaking Ukrainians from the transnationalism perspective**

The theory of transnationalism has largely not been applied to hybrid populations of the post-Soviet space, especially Russian-speaking Ukrainians, before, as it mostly focused on groups traditionally viewed as engaging in regular transnational practices (i.e. remittances), such as Mexican migrants in the US, Vietnamese populations in Australia, Polish migrants in the UK etc. Vihalemm et al. (2019) and Vihalemm & Juzefovičs (2020) applied the transnational framework extensively to Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia to see how residents (who often don't have full legal status and are caught in between the political rhetoric of the European Union and Russia) engage in media practices that cross borders, and how this affects their identifications and views on citizenship. Following Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore (2018), Parrado (2017) and Redclift & Rajina (2019), I focus on specificities of the Russian-speaking Ukrainian group and the local and transnational contexts that define it, and how approaching it from a transnational perspective helps break out of the 'methodological nationalism' that dominates discussions of Ukraine and the Ukrainian identity, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002).

Russian-speaking Ukrainians (together with Russian-speakers in Ukraine) are a diverse group formed not particularly as a result of distinct migration waves and policies of the Soviet Union (as is the case with Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia), but rather in a much lengthier process of cultural exchange and mutual influence across borders that have shifted over the course of several centuries. The history of both states is intertwined and full of problematic aspects in terms of memory politics (which go much further back than the recent violent crisis), which affect how the issue of the Russian language and culture is framed in the public debate.

So, having that in mind and adding the element of an ongoing conflict, what propositions does the transnational framework have that are applicable to the case of Ukraine? Firstly, Però (2013) suggests that we should approach migrant practices, as well as their justification strategies, as reflections of state policies and narratives that can discursively include or exclude the migrant/minority group, absorbing instances of injustice. The local context, policies and narratives produce responses in hybrid groups that engage in transnational practices, but researchers' views on these responses differ. Under the pressure of essentialising narratives, a hybrid group can fall back into transnational practices as a form of resistance: 'reactive transnationalism' (Redclift & Rajina, 2019). Kwok-Bun & Plüss (2013) further suggest differentiating between (innovative) migrant transnationalism and (rebellious) migrant cosmopolitanism. The difference between the two is that, under pressures to assimilate into the dominant state narrative, hybrid subjects can choose to attempt to change institutions and rules to accommodate their multiple loyalties, or reject nation-centric frameworks altogether, asserting themselves as something separate, a sort of 'Third Space' (Bhabha,

1994; Kwok-Bun & Plüss, 2013). In other words, transnationalism can be seen as a constructive mode of re-negotiation of existing frameworks to create new systems that support fluid modes of living (e.g. having multiple citizenships, tax residencies, community memberships etc.), while cosmopolitanism rejects any institutional engagement (Kwok-Bun & Plüss, 2013).

Ultimately, this research aims to shine light on the multiple loyalties and multi-place modes of existence of Russian-speaking Ukrainians, and tries to articulate how their transnational practices and rhetoric fit into existing modes of coping with the pressures of hybridity, globalisation and conflict.

To conclude, the theoretical framework of this research is multifaceted. At its core is the investigation of constructions of identity in the ontological sense. The main conceptualising tool to analyse changes in identity constructions is the concept of *symbolic boundaries* (Lamont, 1992). I look at the processes of identity construction and boundary-work in the context of acute social change (i.e. the conflict between Ukraine and Russia), which is understood through the concept of *cultural trauma* (Sztompka, 2000a). A consequence of trauma/change, shifting physical and symbolic borders, creates the need to address transnational aspects of subjects' social practices, including *media practices* (Couldry et al., 2014) and the way the re-conceptualisation of these practices feeds into identity- and boundary-work, which is done through the framework of *transnationalism* (Vertovec, 2007). I follow up the discussion of theoretical concepts with an in-depth look at the particulars of the case study, to flesh out the ambiguity of identity performance and group boundaries in Ukraine.

## 4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question that unites the three studies comprising this research is: ***How has the construction of the national identity of Russian-speaking Ukrainians transformed in the context of the conflict with Russia?***

More specific sub-questions explored in Studies I, II and III are:

1. **How do Russian-speaking Ukrainians reflect the political changes resulting from the conflict between Ukraine and Russia in their construction of national and ethnic identity?**
  - 1.1. How is the annexation of Crimea narrated by Crimean residents? – *Study I.*
  - 1.2. How have symbolic boundaries between Ukraine and Russia been conceptualised and narrated by the Russian-speaking Ukrainians since the start of the conflict? – *Study II.*
2. **How do Russian-speaking Ukrainians' discourses around online media practices reflect the changes in their construction of Ukraine's national and ethnic identity in the context of the crisis? – *Study III.***
3. **What role do transnational practices play in the identity construction of Russian-speaking Ukrainians in the conflict context?**
  - 3.1. What transnational aspects can be found in the digital media practices of Russian-speaking Ukrainians? – *Study III.*
  - 3.2. What role have these practices played in performing identity and civic engagement among Russian-speaking Ukrainians since the start of the conflict? – *Study III.*
4. **How can the study of transnational subjects' identity construction in the conflict context be approached theoretically?**

## 5. METHODOLOGY

### 5.1. Research inspired by sociological reflexivity

The body of this research is comprised of three studies conducted using qualitative methods, based on the fieldwork carried out in Crimea in 2016 and in Kyiv in 2018. The qualitative method design makes it possible to channel a multitude of experiences – collecting data through fieldwork, observations of participants' behaviour and the stories that surface during interviews – into a comprehensive and holistic picture (Creswell et al., 2007). This picture, however, cannot be fully understood without engaging with the researcher regarding their positionality in the field in relation to the study topic, and the foundations that have informed the general approach of this study.

As the research was conducted two years after the annexation (**Study I**) and four years after the Revolution of Dignity/start of the conflict (**Study II** and **III**), it involved post-hoc constructions produced by individuals to make sense of the change, and the individual level discourses were expected to relate to the structures of the socio-political context, and systematically reproduce the new boundaries between state/group identities of the given community.

In this research, I tried to create space for participants to reflect on their relationship with the concept of national and ethnic identity in the context of conflict. I tried to balance this by reflecting on my own relationship with these concepts and various institutional frameworks (as a person born and raised in Crimea) that might have conditioned my interpretation of the findings. I address this through the self-reflection subchapter of this chapter. I also address ethical considerations and design limitations in addition to the methodology description presented below.

### 5.2. Sample and the interview framework

The materials collected with the help of participants through semi-structured interviews were analysed using the tools of discourse analysis, which is a common approach in identity and ontological narrativity research (Alexander et al., 2004; Eyerman, 2001; Giddens, 1991; Sztompka, 2004). I allowed flexibility in both the sampling procedure and the interviewing process; having entered the study with one set of research questions, I exited with a different set.

Overall, during the whole study I remained open to different sampling arrangements, although in the end the snowball method was used most often. I activated my personal networks in both Crimea and Kyiv and, since most of my networks were from childhood times and were quite diverse, the variability of participants' backgrounds was ensured to some extent.

The combined sample of the research (Studies I, II and III) included 31 participants, with their demographic characteristics outlined in Table 2.

**Table 2.** *The sample of the study*

	<b>Ukraine</b>
Total number of people who were interviewed	31
Locations of interviews	Kyiv (14 interviews) Crimea (17 interviews)
Gender	
Male	11
Female	20
Age	
Up to 35	14
36–55 years	12
56+ years	5
Education	
Basic	0
Secondary	5
Higher	26

### **5.2.1. Study I**

Study I included 17 interviews that were conducted in January 2016 in several cities of Crimea (Dzhankoy, Simferopol, Sevastopol and Feodosiia). Five interview candidates were selected from a distance; after arrival in Crimea and the commencement of the interviewing process, a snowball method paired with ‘purposive’ (‘convenience’) sampling was used. I used my personal network in Crimea and the help of one contact person with a certain prominence in the community to engage the participants. Then, the initial participants were asked to suggest possible candidates for further interviewing. The snowball method has its limitations, but turned out to be a necessity due to the precarious nature of doing research in an occupied territory.

The selection criteria for participants were permanent residency in the Crimean Peninsula and, ultimately, willingness to discuss political topics. Their age ranged from 22 to 67 years old (the distribution was rather even); there were five men and 12 women. Occupation-wise, the largest share of my participants came from the private sector (six were private entrepreneurs), followed by medical workers (two), pensioners (two), university employees (two), students (two), teachers (two) and a designer. In terms of education, most of the participants had un/finished higher education. This result was coincidental: even though Study I mentions ‘higher education’ as a criterion for participant selection, I never actually inquired about education levels when looking for potential

participants (before the interviews). Many of the participants were born in the Soviet Union, where acquiring higher education was free and widespread; they might also have reported finishing vocational schools as having higher educational levels, or could have just provided a socially desirable answer. These reasons could explain (at least partially) the over-representation of educated people in the sample. This limitation is further addressed in section 5.3.1.

In terms of subjective self-identification, eight identified as ‘Russian’, five as ‘Ukrainian’, one as ‘Ukrainian and Crimean’, one as ‘Crimean Tatar’, and one as ‘Crimean’. Some participants were ambiguous or unable to clearly state their ethnic identity, probably because the notion of ‘Ukrainian Russophone’ has experienced a drift in meaning and became blurred with ‘Russians in Ukraine’ (Zakem et al., 2015). I stopped recruiting new participants when no new themes emerged during the interviews. At some point, I also started sensing possible risks in attracting the attention of the authorities in such a small community (dangers to my contact person and myself) in the context of human rights violations in Crimea.

My interview framework underwent transformation during the course of the study as well. While I had a programme for the semi-structured interview (see Appendix) that focused on asking about the participants’ backgrounds, self-identifications, language use etc., in the course of interviews, which sometimes lasted up to three hours, I found myself listening to my participants talk about everything that had happened in their lives in the past two or three years, reflecting the intertwining of the political and the personal (Harutyunyan et al., 2009). Due to the widely discussed role of attitude in the cultural trauma and explicit stance-taking, in which participants engaged before re-telling their stories, I decided to classify interviewees in terms of their attitudes to the change (supportive, non-supportive or ambivalent), although, of course, each individual’s stance was more a point on a continuum than a clear-cut position (Sztompka, 2000a). The participants’ stances were also examined in terms of the clarity of the narration of their emotions, as this related to participants’ feelings of ideational integrity and ontological security (Giddens, 1991; Somers, 1994). During the interviews and subsequent analysis, I observed the themes (trauma, identity and belonging) emerge bottom-up, rather than ascribing meanings by enforcing a strict interview framework.

## **5.2.2. Studies II and III**

Study II was based on a collection of 14 in-depth interviews gathered in Kyiv in 2018. I used a similar method synthesis: activating my network in Kyiv, and following ‘purposive’ sampling logic coupled with the snowball method. The main criteria for participants included Russian as the main language of communication (in many cases, the language of ‘thinking’) and Ukrainian citizenship. Most of the participants also had Ukraine as the place of socialisation during their formative years.



The snow-ball method became particularly useful as initially I focused on the Kyiv-based Russian-speakers, who generally had a very clear sense of ethnic and national belonging by virtue of living close to the political centre in the aftermath of a civic protest movement (the Revolution of Dignity, 2013–2014). However, in the course of the interviews, I gained access to networks of *internally displaced persons* from the eastern regions of Ukraine (IDPs) residing in Kyiv, who provided complex context and an illustration of different strategies of the conceptualisation of national and ethnic identities. Additionally, both Crimean residents and IDPs had much more heterogeneous media consumption practices than Kyiv dwellers, which became clear in Study III. Overall, it made the sample more representative of the study focus: the periphery between symbolic ‘Ukraine’ and ‘Russia’. Eight participants were from the Donetsk or Luhansk areas, two from Crimea and the other four from Kyiv. This provided additional value to the cross-cutting issues raised by participants, as well as the thin context of the analysis. Women were slightly over-represented (eight vs. six men), and the sample was also slightly skewed towards the civic sector in terms of professions (four out of 14).

As with Study I, the interview format included semi-structured discussions of such topics as language practices, changes in participants’ lives after 2014, changes in the country, experiences of travelling in Ukraine and Russia, national and other identifications, general media use, etc. The semi-structured format (see Appendix for the interview programme) was more productive in the case of Studies II and III as the interviews were more removed in time from the events of 2013–2014 (the start of the conflict) than during Study I, and I felt that the participants needed more guidance in shifting between topics. However, I still aimed to remain flexible and pick up on emerging topics and areas of interest for participants.

For the purposes of Study III, which examined rationalisations for media use, I added a number of interactive exercises, where participants recreated their online media routines, while commenting on (rationalising) their particular activities (Wodak et al., 2009). Sharing an activity with the study participants added an element of play to the interviews (Malaby, 2009), and reinforced the idea that I was open to sharing meaning creation with them.

### 5.3. Analysis

All three studies broadly employed discourse analysis, but focussed on different approaches, based on the focus of the study (Table 3).

**Table 3.** *Analysis overview*

	Study I	Study II	Study III
Sample	17 participants (Crimea, multiple locations)	14 participants (Kyiv)	
Material collection	Semi-structured interviews	Semi-structured interviews	Interactive exercises + interviews
Analysis	Discourse analysis, narrative analysis	Discourse-historical approach of Discourse analysis	Social practice analysis
Link to the research questions	Describe narratives of the annexation of Crimea: <b>how the narratives of Crimean annexation reflect larger changes in national identity narratives between Ukraine and Russia (R1)</b>	Describe strategies for explaining ‘Russianness’ and ‘Ukrainianness’ among Russian-speaking Ukrainians: <b>how Russian-speaking Ukrainians re-negotiate their identifications and group boundaries in the conflict context; how this affects national identity narratives in Ukraine (R1)</b>	Describe changing online media practices among Russian-speaking Ukrainians: <b>how hybrid online media practices are performed and narrated by Russian-speaking Ukrainians (R2); how transnational practices and discourses affect the Ukrainian national identity narrative (R3)</b>

#### 5.3.1. Narrative analysis and discourse analysis – Studies I and II

**Studies I and II** analyses were broadly informed by the discourse-analytical approach. Discourse analysis is a more general research method that studies language in its entirety, together with the extra-linguistic context, practices and meanings created in the process of using speech. Critical discourse analysis (CDA), on the other hand, is concerned with how language is used to uphold power institutions and inequalities (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Study I used narrative analysis (which is part of CDA), focusing on how participants, using language in connection to context, made sense of their life experiences, and how this informed their views of themselves as individuals and members of national and ethnic groups. Study II used the discourse-historical approach (DHA), also part of CDA, and focused more specifically on how language (as part of

discourse) is used to construct identities and group boundaries in a particular historical context (De Celia et al., 1999).

The use of narrative analysis in **Study I** was justified by the proven role of story-telling in identity development, as stories reflect ‘...a degree of embodiment, absorption in a story to real-world effects’ (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004, p. 14). Somers & Gibson (1993) even claim that narrative is an ‘ontological condition of a social life’, by which they mean that experiences are assembled and combined in order to ‘fit’ a cohesive narrative that usually reinforces the feeling of ontological security. Narratives affect the performativity of identity (whereby an act of speech consummates an action), but they also absorb and reflect changes in actors and the space of performance, as well as unintended consequences of the narrative (Lloyd, 1999).

As for **Study II**, the analysis of the collected materials was conducted in the Discourse-Historical Approach to critical discourse studies, as conceptualised for the field of politics and national identity research by Reisigl and Wodak (De Celia et al., 1999; Reisigl, 2008, 2014, 2017). The DHA offers a reasonable flexibility in analysing a given societal challenge by focusing on developing conceptual tools for each particular problem, without ‘getting lost in the grand theories’, and it has been tested in many studies in the field (Wodak, 2015b, 2015a).

DHA suggests a general multilevel top-down analysis scheme:

- (1) The topic/content of the discourse,
- (2) Specific discursive strategies (argumentation),
- (3) Means and forms of realisation (Wodak et al., 2009).

As for the thematic content of the analysed materials, in **Study II** I focused on the linguistic construction of the ‘boundaries’ between what it means to be Ukrainian or Russian; the perception of the border dynamics and narratives of the post-2014 understanding of ‘Ukrainianness’ and ‘Russianness’, and their interrelation, as well as the subjects’ personal engagement with the borders. Where the ‘border(s)’ are, in a symbolic sense, defines who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’, in other words the content of identity and subjectivity itself. I looked into the specific means of achieving the communicative goals (e.g. emphasising/de-emphasising the border), mostly strategies of assimilation (creating homogeneity) and dissimilation (heterogeneity) (Wodak et al., 2009; Wodak & Matouschek, 1993).

I analysed the means and forms along the lines of personal references (use of pronouns, generic terms etc.), spatial references (toponyms and geonyms) and temporal references (use of times).

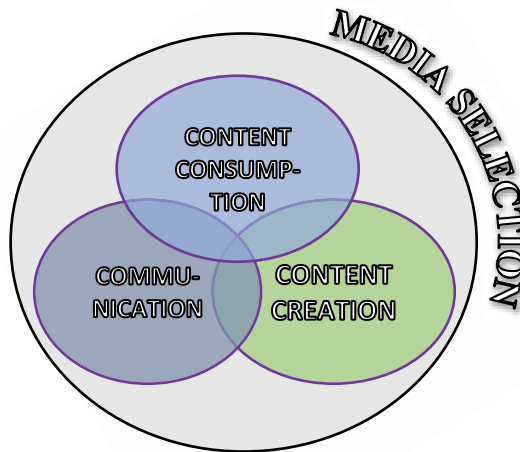
For the purposes of better understanding the context of acts of speech, means and forms of realisation are discussed in their relation to strategies. Means and forms are mostly discussed in circumstances where they add to the understanding of the border construction and identity strategies of participants.

### 5.3.2. Social practice analysis – Study III

For **Study III**, which involved both the analysis of media practices as phenomena, and rationalisation strategies of participants engaging in them, I decided to adopt the lens of social practice theory-based analysis (which also allowed me to develop Couldry's (2012) concept of media-related practices further), looking at three elements of social practice suggested by Shove & Pantzar (2005):

- (1) **Meaning:** interpretation attributed to practice by different groups of practitioners, as well as outsiders, who may understand a practice differently.
- (2) **Tools:** objects necessary to perform the practice; room/space and infrastructure that make an activity possible
- (3) **Skills:** reflective and tacit competences needed to perform a practice; both cognitive and bodily, both discursive and reflective, as well as practical and tacit.

Based on the analysis of the core elements (meanings, skills and tools), I defined four categories of mutually related media practices (bundles of practices according to Schatzki & Schatzki (1996)) for analysis: media selection practices, content consumption practices, content creation practices and communication practices, which echo some of the types of practice developed by Couldry (2012); see also Vihalemm et al. (2019), Vihalemm & Juzefovičs (2020).



*Figure 2. Mapping of media practices*

In the bundle of media practices, I see media selection as framing practice that forms the infrastructure for the performance of other practices. Couldry talks about searching and search enabling practices: different strategies of how people 'optimize their access to vastly expanded flow of potentially relevant information' (Couldry, 2012, p. 32). This is also close to the 'searching and organising practices' defined by Vihalemm & Juzefovičs (2020).

In this study, I expanded on the more general tension outlined by Couldry (2012): between *keeping channels open* (heterophily) and *screening out* (homophily); in other words, whether a user is prioritising diverse, potentially challenging sources of getting information, as opposed to streamlined, single-narrative ones. Heterophily is defined as engaging with content/activities that either originate from countries other than Ukraine or from occupied/uncontrolled territories (Crimea and parts of the Donbass). I looked into rationalisations and interpretations attached to choosing some media platforms over others, subscribing/unsubscribing, etc.: activities focused on putting together a certain media ‘puzzle’. These practices presupposed specific tools and skills, e.g. in the Ukrainian context, the ability to use VPN for certain platforms.

The ‘allure of homophily’ (Gu et al., 2014) is that people often seek familiarity/reassurance through their online practices. On the other hand, researchers have consistently associated heterophily with civic engagement, and it is generally accepted that more diverse and issue-oriented media practices lead to higher levels of civic engagement (for an overview, see Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). At the same time, it has been demonstrated that while hybrid communities tend to construct their news consumption from multiple sources, ‘like a puzzle’, this does not often lead to taking up alternative narratives (Szostek, 2017, 2018a; Vihalemm & Juzefovičs, 2020). Therefore, the influence of the conflict context on the way users engaged in and rationalised practices of heterophily, as well as the impact of heterophily on the civic identity narrative, became a part of this study.

Communication practices, in turn, carried the meaning of conveying information between users privately. The wide variety of tools employed presupposed varying degrees of competences, in addition to the general knowledge of using specific resources. Moreover, conflict-imposed limitations (e.g. the severance of mobile connection with occupied territories, and the blocking of VK) made users adapt according to their level of competence. Transnational practices here were conceptualised as engaging in communication with users from abroad and/or carrying alternative narratives (e.g. from Russia and the uncontrolled territories (Crimea and the Donbass)).

I defined content consumption as practices of passive acquisition of information, accompanied by various meanings: news, entertainment, hobbies, etc. In this sense Couldry’s (2012) and Vihalemm & Juzefovičs’ (2020) ‘keeping up with the news’ constitutes just one part of this broader category. Transnational practices in this category were understood as the consumption of content originating from abroad/uncontrolled territories and/or conveying the challenging of mainstream (pro-Russian) narratives.

Content creation practices were defined as practices carrying the meaning of production of new information (posting, uploading pictures etc.). Due to the interactive nature of the tools involved (social network platforms), content creation practices often contained a significant degree of communication (e.g. commenting). In this sense, the line between content creation and communication is blurry, although content creation mostly happens in the public sphere, while

communication happens in private. Content creation generally requires higher level skills (as well as aesthetic competence) than communication does. Transnational practices here were understood as producing content that challenged the state narrative and/or brought ‘alien’ elements (e.g. the re-conceptualisation of uncontrolled territories) into the discourse.

Defined practices were mapped along the axes of the degree of homo- / heterophily (to illustrate the degree of transnationalism) and engagement. The analysis was done by practice category, to illustrate various practices (low engagement homophily, low engagement heterophily etc.) side by side, while enabling better comparison. Strategies of rationalisation were discussed to identify concepts and values that participants referred to, as well as specific meanings attached to practices.

To conclude, the methodology of this research combines several approaches depending on the analytical aim and the object of inquiry of each particular study, but is ultimately informed by the foundations of the discourse analysis approach. The findings of the studies are presented according to the general logic of the research question in the following chapter.

## **5.4. Limitations, ethics and reflections**

Before discussing the study findings, I will address the limitations arising from the study design and some aspects of the methodology. I will also return to the foundations of this study, inspired by sociological reflexivity, and address a number of issues arising from doing a qualitative study in a politically-polarised context on a topic that has importance for both participants and me, as a researcher and agent in a particular social structure. I will follow Bourdieu & Wacquant’s (1992) tradition of reflexivity in sociology, and will attempt to outline tensions between the structural properties that have conditioned the way I conceive of the subject matter and my individual circumstances that may have influenced the study’s conclusions. This exercise in self-inquiry will allow me to reserve space for agency and creativity in this study and, more importantly, to de-objectify the participants, whose perspectives were foundational for this research.

### **5.4.1. Limitations**

The first limitation of this study is the possible bias caused by the sampling methods. Because of the context of the research, especially in Crimea, the sampling tended to rely too much on convenience, skewing the heterogeneity of the population. The snowball method also tends to produce homogeneous samples; however, there is a difference between using the snowball method simply for procuring contacts and using it as a methodological guideline (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). I strived to balance the sample composition and involve those participants that were more likely to give diverse perspectives.

The sample of Study I was fairly representative of different age groups and somewhat representative of different geographical areas of Crimea, but was significantly skewed towards women and those with skills/education. The perspectives of men, and especially uneducated men, were marginalised. I tried to counter the bias in Studies II and III, reaching the final composition of 2:1 (women:men). One partial counterargument is that there are more women than men in Crimea and in Ukraine (1.2:1)<sup>11</sup>, and women are more likely to participate in sociological studies overall (Curtin et al., 2000). The number of women was also likely the result of the heavier use of the snowball method in Study I than in Studies II and III. However, I would argue that among the participants I witnessed the emergence of similar narrative elements when describing the topic of the study. The discussions emphasised national, ethnic and (quite often) occupational/class identities, so gender performances were somewhat muted.

Another issue is the location of the participant recruitment for Studies II and III. Even though my sample ended up being rather diverse (it included local Kyiv-raised Russian-speakers, and internally displaced persons from Donetsk, Luhansk and Crimea), Kyiv, as a research locality, clearly differs from other Ukrainian cities. On one hand, Kyiv is the capital of Ukraine, a large urban area, where the share of Ukrainian- and Russian-speakers is roughly equal<sup>12</sup>, which suggests that it is tolerant of Russian-speakers in general. On the other hand, Kyiv was the centre of the Revolution of Dignity protests; it has been and remains one of the most politically engaged cities in Ukraine. On one hand, it is reasonable to assume that self-selection among the internally displaced persons who ended up participating in my studies occurred: those more pro-Ukrainian to begin with moved to Kyiv, while the pro-Russian ones moved to Russia, and never had a chance to participate. In addition, Kyiv is the economic centre of Ukraine (while also being more accessible than large Russian-dominated cities), so the economic factors are likely to have mitigated the influence of self-selection.

An even more important limitation of the study was the lack of Crimean Tatar representation. Crimean Tatars are the indigenous population of the Crimean Peninsula, and have carried on a civic struggle to receive compensation for the forced re-location of 1944 (Soviet period), as well as support for their cultural autonomy rights (Aydın, 2014). Since the annexation, there have been continuing reports of human rights violations specifically directed at Crimean Tatars, who have been vocal critics of the Russian state (Aydın & Sahin, 2019; Aydın, 2014). In 2015, a few months before the start of my fieldwork, four electric grid pylons (situated in southern Ukraine) that provided electricity to

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<sup>11</sup> According to the Ukrainian electronic census conducted in 2019 and the data from the Russian statistical bureau on Crimea from 2018.

<sup>12</sup> A 2015 poll of the International Republication Institute (Canada) showed that 27% of Kyiv dwellers speak Ukrainian at home, 32% Russian and 40% both. Accessed from: [https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/2015-05-19\\_ukraine\\_national\\_municipal\\_survey\\_march\\_2-20\\_2015.pdf](https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/2015-05-19_ukraine_national_municipal_survey_march_2-20_2015.pdf)

Crimea were blown up, and it was widely assumed that Crimean Tatar activists perpetrated the attack<sup>13</sup>. When I was conducting my fieldwork, electricity was still supplied during certain hours of the day only, and the public attitude towards Tatars was rather negative and tense. I reached out to possible Tatar participants (succeeding in obtaining one), but overall I found it much harder to persuade Tatars that the interviews and their opinions would remain anonymous. Fear and uncertainty, coupled with the influence of my ethnic background, acted as hurdles to establishing trust and rapport with possible Tatar participants. I encountered similar concerns (tacit or explicit) with the Ukrainian Russian participants and worked to create a safe space for them, but did not succeed to the same degree with Crimean Tatars, as they perceived risks to be higher.

I fully respected concerns regarding safety that were expressed; to some degree, however, unfortunately my study did not solicit perspectives from Crimean Tatars. This leads me to the discussion of ethics in the study, as well as a larger discussion of how issues of fear and trust were addressed in the study.

#### **5.4.2. Ethics**

Sociological research in conflict areas produces multiple concerns for the community and for the researcher. These are concerns regarding ‘doing no harm’ to research participants, difficulties in accessing marginalised groups in a polarised context and the general lack of trust resulting from fear that can skew the results or make the research impossible altogether (Leuenberger, 2015). Fear exists in public and private spaces; it is reproduced through national (media) discourses and is usually combined with participants’ psychic experiences, in this case of the annexation: glimpses of armed units, the appearance of a different currency, and changes in taxation and school programmes (Shirlow & Pain, 2003). While fear makes it harder to access participants’ insights by conventional means, it encourages the researcher to rely more heavily on co-creation and truly participatory frameworks in the research, as a way to mitigate barriers of mistrust.

In the case of this research, I started off by addressing participants’ concerns directly, usually in conversations that preceded the dissemination of consent forms. All of the participants in the three studies signed informed consent forms, where I outlined the subject of the research (as much as I could define its focus at that time) and my obligations to protect the participants’ anonymity and confidentiality. I took responsibility for anonymising interview materials so that quotes couldn’t be linked to individuals, and for outlining how the raw data would be stored. The informed consent form followed the conventions for sociological research accepted at the University of Tartu, and was approved by my supervisor.

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<sup>13</sup> BBC 2015, ‘Crimea without power after pylons blown up’, accessed at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34893493>



I shared the interview programme for all studies with the participants before the interviews; however, I found that it had little effect on the course of the interviews, as most people neglected to read it. Before the start of every interview, I made sure to outline again the focus of the study, and my responsibilities as a researcher towards the participants.

The research resulted in the publication of articles in peer-reviewed journals in English. While sharing drafts wasn't possible for the first article, as the majority of the participants didn't speak English, with the second article I shared the draft with the interviewees and asked for their feedback. I had some participants change the translation and wording of their quotes to better reflect their views; several other participants recommended articles that they felt would be useful for my research and/or that supported their world-views. These were limited aspects of co-creation that I nevertheless was happy to facilitate (Mulder & Stappers, 2009).

### **5.4.3. Self-reflection**

One major challenge of qualitative research, especially in a one-on-one setting, is that the researcher's socialisation and values can influence participants' accounts (Creswell et al., 2007). To address that issue, I tried to reflect on any possible biases I might have and, for the purposes of the transparency of this study, situate myself in the field and disclose any pre-conceptions I might hold about the topic and participants (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Chaudhry, 1997). Moreover, the interview accounts were influenced by attributes, other than being a researcher, that generally shape interactions within the field: nationality, language spoken, class, gender etc. (Lincoln, 2005).

I am a Russian-speaking (or bilingual) Ukrainian, born in Crimea, in independent Ukraine. I share the language and experiences of socialisation and education with most of my participants, which made it easier to establish trust and connection. However, this might have also reinforced their immediate identifications as Russian-speakers, as the interviews were conducted in Russian and discussed issues of politics and identity.

My family context, coupled with the lack of consistent educational and language policies in Crimea, has significantly shaped my social positioning in Ukraine, as well as some of my views on national identity. My family is mixed: one parent is ethnic Russian and the other is ethnic Ukrainian, and both of them were newcomers in Crimea. With a lack of discussion of ethnic or national issues at home and in school, I felt like many of my peers and I lacked socialisation into the Ukrainian state. The feeling of alienation from both Ukraine and Russia for me went away after the university years in Kyiv, supporting the assumption that higher education institutions often act as spaces for socialisation into national identity practices through repeated enactment of 'methodological nationalism' (Shahjahan & Kezar, 2013). My own conceptions of nationalism and patriotism were also formed in the aftermath of the Revolution of Dignity

(2013–2014), which coincided with my student years. During the protests and the ensuing annexation, I felt mostly fear and shock, feelings that probably were shared by many people not used to reflecting on matters of politics, identity and public interest. However, similar to some of my study participants, the years after the events were characterised by post-hoc reflections on what the events of 2013–2014 *meant* or *why they happened*. My assumption is that these reflections, if studied qualitatively, can show the changes that drastic events – including conflicts – can have on national and ethnic identity construction processes. However, there is always a risk that one’s ideas will eclipse reality, which is why, after understanding how ‘close’ I am to the topic of the study, I focused on distancing myself from any preconceptions I had on the matter and trying to stick to neutral performances as a researcher (e.g. emphasising that I was from an Estonian university), to limit my influence on the participants.

Having discussed the methodological foundations of this study, in the next chapter I will present the results from Studies I, II and III, grouped by themes.

## 6. FINDINGS

### 6.1. Shifts in identity narratives in Ukraine after 2013–2014

The results of Study I, Study II and Study III converge on the events of 2013–2014, the Revolution of Dignity, the annexation of Crimea and the start of the conflict in Donbas, leading to major shifts in how identity construction and boundary-work were approached on the individual level, especially as concerns the relationship – and symbolic boundaries in various life spheres – with Russia.

As mentioned above, I agree with Knott (2018) in viewing peripheral spaces in Ukraine, such as Crimea and the eastern regions, as spaces where, before the conflict, in many ways because of the legacies of the Soviet past, language mixing and widespread use of cross-border media content, ethnic categories of ‘Ukrainians’ and ‘Russians’ collapsed; basically, one identity was not mutually exclusive of the other. In other words, people could identify as ‘both Ukrainian and Russian’.

The results of Studies I and II point to the fact that that, to a large extent, has not been the case since 2013. The main result of the events of 2013–2014 was that the two ethnic categories became irreconcilable with one another, and it became increasingly difficult to maintain an identity as both Ukrainian and Russian (hybrid). However, comparing the findings from Studies I and II illuminates the different dynamics of border construction in different spaces of Ukraine: the former periphery (Crimea, Study I) vs the more centrally connected (and formerly more politically active) regions in the east and in the capital region (Studies II and III).

Study I focused on Crimea as a habitat shaping narratives of its participants; it identified three more or less distinctive ways that people made sense of the protests of 2013 and the annexation in 2014, based on the division of participants into supporters of the change, non-supporters and the ambivalent. Study I claimed that these narratives served as bases for new identities, supporting the claim of Somers & Gibbson (1993) that narratives function as spaces for identity performance. The field work for Study I was conducted in 2016, two years prior to the field work for Studies II and III, therefore offering a glance at Crimea as a microcosm characterised by extremely polarised narratives almost right after the change, as opposed to mainland Ukraine, where the division arguably is not as drastic and is further removed in time (comparatively distanced from the traumatising event).

As was mentioned above, Study I identified three narratives of the political change in Crimea. The sole fact of the group division and existence of opposing, more or less coherent, narratives among participants leads to the conclusion that the change in Crimea resulted in the creation of additional boundaries inside the community and, ultimately, undermined its unity. The stories told by participants mirrored, although in a more personal way, grander narratives perpetuated by public discourses of Ukraine and Russia (‘Russian aggression’ vs. ‘coming

home to Russia'), incorporating echoes of the recently strengthened Ukrainian nationalism and Russian expansionism.

The findings of Study II supported the conclusions of Study I, although offering a glimpse from 'the Other side'. While Study I focused on a community with a majority pro-Russian stance (even though non-supporters were part of the sample), Study II mostly engaged with Russian-speakers who were still hybrid in practices, but by and large pro-Ukrainian. Study II results demonstrated rather strong border solidification (which would be expected given the conflict). The conflict that started in 2014 was framed as a 'watershed' that placed individuals into a value system that demanded clear side-taking; moreover, some accounts corroborated the claim that previously Ukrainians and Russians effectively acted as one in peripheral regions ('In Donetsk, we didn't separate into Ukrainians and Russians...' <sup>14</sup>). What is noteworthy in the context of the conflict is that Russian-speaking participants from these areas (compared with Russian-speakers from Kyiv) felt under greater pressure to adapt to the changes in performance and narratives of the Ukrainian national identity, to 'justify' their hybrid practices (e.g. speaking Russian), which was ultimately manifested in two possible responses: acceptance of the border solidification or negotiation/denial.

Study I, as mentioned above, was conducted just two years after the crisis, at the same time that the electricity blackout and subsequent cut-off of Crimea from the Ukrainian electricity grid exacerbated political tensions. Therefore, Study I offers a fresh, almost raw look into the divided community dynamics. Study II, conducted in 2018, engaged with the process of border solidification that arguably had been happening for a longer stretch of time. Accounts of participants in Study II united often contradictory statements, which, in turn, can be grouped around two poles, highlighting the main tension in the narrative: **acceptance of the solidification of border(s)** (the theme of 'National awakening') vs. **negotiation or denial of the solidification** (the theme of 'Manipulation/Unnecessary securitisation'). Ultimately, the accounts demonstrated a complex blend of efforts to construct some borders while de-constructing others.

To understand this point more deeply, we should recall that there is not one, but multiple borders which the population of Ukraine engages with, as previous research has suggested. The one that became heavily politicised after the outbreak of the conflict is the macro-border between symbolic 'Ukraine' and 'Russia' as states. However, participants' accounts demonstrated a rather dynamic picture, where borders were understood in relation and interaction with each other (e.g. external state borders vs. internal west/east division, value-based, cultural and linguistic borders). Moreover, the accounts were dominated by the tension between the 'brightness' and 'blurriness' of various aspects of the borders, such as language, media practices, consumption, cultural preferences, certain traditions and symbols, and even clothes. While the participants employed

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<sup>14</sup> Interview 3, Kyiv, February 2018

active efforts to construct some aspects of the border(s), other aspects were negotiated, challenged and denied.

Border solidification between Ukraine and Russia was framed through the narrative of ‘National awakening’ and ‘Support for Ukraine’, a voluntary effort to either construct one’s own identity as a ‘Ukrainian’ or to bring one’s life-story and life-attributes in line with the dominant understanding of ‘Ukrainianness’ (Study II). Accounts manifested an active process of manufacturing visual/linguistic/cultural cues to substantiate one’s position within the symbolic space of Ukraine in the context of decreasing support for blurriness and hybridity, and increased cross-labelling (but at the same time, small perceived distances between the groups). In other words, Study II showed that as a result of the conflict and polarisation inside the country, being a Russian-speaker (especially from the Donbas or Crimea) came to mean a degree of ambiguity and risk, which some participants tried to mitigate by adjusting their cultural practices (switching to Ukrainian, consuming more Ukrainian media etc.). The case was the opposite for Study I, because, as a result of the annexation, the political context supported practices that were associated with the Russian cultural space (speaking Russian, consuming Russian media etc.). Therefore, as concerns Study II, the border construction cues mentioned above – language use, symbols etc. – can be seen as means of justifying the new position of Russian-speakers in the context of solidification, which were transactional in nature. But the process of engaging with some transactions and denying others suggests that the participants not only reflected on the changes in the public narrative, but also exercised active agency in constructing the meaning of ‘Ukrainianness’.

Study II builds on the conclusions of Study I, illuminating how, in the polarisation and border solidification caused by the conflict, active re-negotiation happened: how much Ukrainian should be used? How ‘Ukrainian’ should the culture preferences be? How much deviation was permitted? etc. As the distance between the two populations was not large, both, arguably, engaged in the negotiation of the meaning and value of the border-constructing practices. The Russian-speakers’ lowered status meant that they had less leverage to exert, although the double competence provided more opportunities for manoeuvring.

## **6.2. Narratives of change – strategies of drawing distinctions**

As noted above, in the case of Crimea, narratives served as spaces to perform new (post-annexation) identities, both for non-supporters (who reported ‘feeling more Ukrainian’) and supporters, who had to integrate themselves into a new ‘Russian Crimea’ community.

**Study I** found that non-supporters reflected and perpetuated the dominant narrative of the Ukrainian public sphere: that they were direct victims of the policy of the Russian Federation, violated and abused. The perceived absence of

justice on the part of the perpetrator (Russia), disempowerment, isolation, and denial of their victimhood in the Russian media and public debate only strengthened the distancing from Russia as a state and the Russian people. To support the assumptions of Kulyk (2014), anti-Russia sentiments were not so much rooted in ethnic factors (the proximity of Ukrainian and Russian cultural spaces was rarely denied), but rather in the issues of politics, policies and values. Running completely opposite to the narrative of non-supporters, the most traumatic, central element of the story for the supporters was the series of protests in 2013, the Revolution of Dignity. According to the participants' accounts, it not only constituted an act of unnecessary violence ('dirty politics' or 'a clash for power'), but also a complete rejection of 'common Slavic values' (again recalling Kuzio's references to the 2013 Revolution of Dignity as a clash between Western Ukrainian and Eastern Slavic nationalisms (Kuzio, 2015b)).

The invisible presence of the boundary played a significant role in the interaction of identity spaces of supporters and non-supporters: while the former refused to establish/acknowledge a boundary between Russians and Ukrainians (the theme of the 'non-existent Ukraine'), the latter, being confronted with the experiences of 'Russian Crimea', constructed a clear boundary between themselves and the supporters (this is further elaborated in **Study II**). This boundary also facilitated maintaining the connection with the Ukrainian identity landscape for them, and even contributed to their deeper integration.

Participants' narratives revolved around two issues: community (its integrity) and agency (responsibility). Labelling Crimeans as 'traitors' and Russians as 'perpetrators', a central element in narratives of both supporters and non-supporters of the geopolitical change in Crimea became a profound act of rejection; the Ukrainian community, always perceived as kin, now turned out to be unfriendly, alien and accusatory. In the same way that the protests of 2013 were perceived as disregarding Crimean identity, 'forgetting and abusing it', the post-Crimean Ukraine, with its emphasis on 'being European' and demonising Russia, was seen as a denial of an important part of the supporters' identity. In this sense, the change was seen as 'evil' because it placed in direct contraposition ideas of Ukrainian and Russian statehood and identity: by choosing one you denied the other. Supportive participants' accounts reflected on the newly established boundary breaking up a 'Slavic' unity between Ukraine and Russia, while the non-supportive participants were instead concerned with a new boundary inside the Crimean community, which undermined its integrity.

On a deeper level though, the narrative of non-supporters was more concerned with the identifications of Crimean supporters and the figurative and physical boundary between Ukraine and Crimea, as the Other. This division concerned many things: most prominently, views on Ukrainian nationhood and statehood. When asked to reproduce the story of events which had happened two years before, participants always said first that the perpetrator (Russia) abused the community (the Crimean population). However, later there was an admission of the shock of realisation that a significant share of the Crimean population was afraid/alien/aggressive/indifferent towards Ukraine, and the

community did not really exist in the way it was seen by non-supporters, as well as Ukrainians in a more general sense. Not only was the ‘imagined community’ with Ukrainians denied, but the act of denial (the referendum) was interpreted as a refusal to accept Ukrainian nationhood and identity. The protests of 2013 (the Revolution of Dignity), as a symbol of democratic renaissance (in the Ukrainian public discourse, as mentioned by Kuzio (2015a), as well as Ukrainian agency as a state were not recognised, echoing Suslov’s point about the almost neo-colonial denial of the existence of Ukrainian statehood widespread in the Russian mainstream public discourse (Suslov, 2014). And the act was also seen as retrospective: the common identity between supporters and non-supporters, as well as between Ukraine and Crimea, not only ceased to exist, but its previous existence was also denied. The narrative of ‘betrayal’ (by Russia as an aggressor, by other Crimeans and/or by Ukraine) also demonstrates that the change was interpreted through the concepts of human relations.

**Study II** moved on from there and asked the question, in the context of polarisation: what narrative strategies do hybrid subjects – Russian-speaking Ukrainians – use to construct/negotiate/deconstruct symbolic boundaries between themselves, Russians and Ukrainians?

The study identified two types of responses to border solidification (two sets of narrative strategies): **acceptance of the solidification** of (some) borders vs. **negotiation/denial**.

Different ways to frame the solidification caused the production of various strategies of border construction and deconstruction. The strategies of construction included the following narratives: *These are different states* (emphasis on formal state attributes, and public and historical narratives); *The people are different* (placing the Ukrainian and Russian populations in opposition to each other through dichotomisation of their characteristics); and *They represent different values* (framing the difference through the opposition of democratic vs. undemocratic).

The strategies of border deconstruction included: *Staying true to yourself* (Double Competence) (emphasis on accepting and reaffirming one’s hybrid dissenting characteristics), *Manipulation of the people* (the narrative of distrust of nationalism and denial of the politicisation of life practices), and *Particularisation* (deconstructing the concepts of ‘Ukraine’ and ‘Russia’ as holistic and homogeneous).

The results of **Study II** substantiated that Russia and ‘Russianness’ have never formed a bigger (if one can apply such an attribute) Other for Ukraine. But for quite some time Russia has been an Other that is not dissimilar enough to produce a unified narrative/image of the symbolic border between Ukraine and Russia (Kulyk, 2018). The conflict, its interpretation and framing (not only in the Ukrainian, but also in the Western public discourse) contributed significantly to solidifying the boundaries and building a more stream-lined national narrative, and participants’ accounts indeed manifested weaker or stronger instances of shifting (although no generalisations to the whole population can be made).

However, based on the content of the analysed strategies, I concluded that the underlying tension behind opposing narratives of constructing some borders while deconstructing others ultimately concerned the content of the dominant Ukrainian national identity narrative. To put it briefly, the deconstruction performed by the Russian-speaking participants was mostly aimed at elements and practices framed as ‘cultural’ and ‘nationalistic’ (narrow), but not at civic ones. Conversely, the civic elements actually provided an additional framework (in the context of opposition between ‘democratic Ukraine’ and ‘undemocratic Russia’) for solidifying the symbolic boundary between the two states. Ultimately, however misused the distinction between ‘ethnic/cultural’ and ‘civic’ nationalisms has been (Kohn 1961), in the Ukrainian context there is a distinct tension between ethnic and civic elements competing for dominance in the national identity narrative, and the Russian-speaking/hybrid populations in Ukraine have a bigger stake in the civic narrative. As was noted by Kuzio (2002), the degree of tension between essentialising and universalising elements in the public discourse depends on the stage of evolution of the nation-building and democratic consolidation: both factors point to Ukraine being in a more turbulent state at the moment, which explains the heightened tension.

Kulyk (2017) noted that the link between language and nationality in Ukraine has been broken. In my view, we can add that while some narratives see this link as important, other emerging ones understand nationality, ‘being Ukrainian’ in civic terms, without any connection to culture-related practices, as ‘becoming Ukrainian’ has been interpreted as a choice grounded in the coordinates of a value-based conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

Moreover, the findings of **Study II** suggested that a lot of the civic engagement exhibited by the Russian-speaking participants was post-national, if not anti-national. It can be interpreted in terms of ‘national indifference’: a push-back-response to rising Ukrainian nationalism (Redclift & Rajina, 2019). On the other hand, given the degree of reflexivity present in the analysed accounts, as well as (mostly) the embrace of citizenship in a more universal sense, this can be understood as a part of the Ukrainian civic national identity discourse. With the public debate oscillating between inclusive and exclusive national identity visions, this narrative can be seen as an attempt to de-securitise certain ‘ways of being’ for vulnerable populations in the conflict context. We can assume that, especially for well-educated Ukrainian Russian-speakers, a multitude of strategies is available for maintaining their position in the society (the distance between groups being small), but it is the post-2014 Ukrainian context itself that produces two opposite responses: an embrace of the more traditional nationalism (with its cultural elements) or its denial (and call for more hybridity). While in this new system of value coordinates the Russian-speakers’ challenging hybrid practices are more evident than before the conflict (as now Ukraine’s and Russia’s public narratives are not compatible any more), the conflict-caused solidification of boundaries provides a new opportunity to write this hybridity into the Ukrainian narrative through concepts of civic engagement.



### 6.3. Changes in online media practices in the context of conflict and polarisation

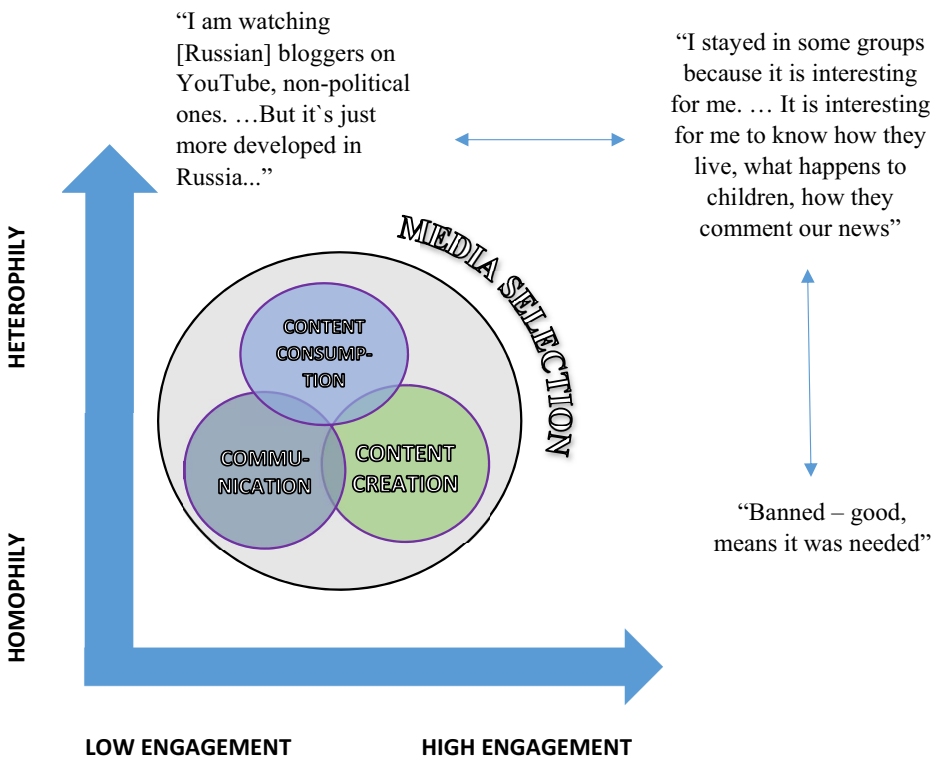
While **Study I** illustrated the actualised boundary inside a community at the centre of conflict, mirroring the grander divide between the national identity narratives of Ukraine and Russia, and **Study II** focussed on how Russian-speaking Ukrainians, in the context of this divide, negotiate symbolic boundaries between ‘Ukrainians’ and ‘Russians’, **Study III** focused on how the conflict-induced polarisation was mirrored in people’s online media practices. The online context came into focus because it has been – during virtually all of Ukraine’s independence period – a hybrid transnational sphere where, because of the widespread use of the Russian language in Ukraine, symbolic boundaries between the two spaces (Ukraine and Russia) were the most porous. While the conflict created conditions conducive to media homophily (active nation-building, distancing from Russia and a ban on Russian resources), the findings of **Study III** showed that hybridity (interpreted as transnationalism) was still maintained through users’ networks and other micro-level mechanisms. Far from being passive receivers of pressure, users exercised their agency by re-shaping their media environments to better suit their needs and identities (unsubscribing, unfollowing, deleting from friends and, ultimately, changing the platform).

**Study III** focused on two aspects of digital practices: *heterophily* in information channels and *engagement*, specifically looking into what strategies participants who either engaged, or didn’t engage, in transnational media practices used to rationalise their activities. The mapping of practices (developing the conceptualisation of Couldry (2012) using social practice theory) is presented in Figure 2. As a result of the analysis, I concluded that heterogeneous (transnational) and homogeneous (nation-bound) practices with high levels of engagement produced separate narratives of national identity in post-conflict Ukraine, echoing the findings of **Study II**.

For all of the strategies, some digital media practices (posting, sharing news and other public digital activities) were viewed as constitutive expressions of their larger offline identities. However, the practices characterised by high engagement and homophily were rationalised through references to the need to ‘grow’ one’s Ukrainian identity and support the state, thus being *nation-centric*. High engagement heterophily though was rationalised through references to the universal human rights/values discourse and, thus, national identity in this narrative was conceptualised from *post-national* and universalising positions.

Practices characterised by low engagement and both homophily and heterophily were rationalised using references to ‘comfort’ and one’s own inherent nature. However, there was an important distinction in the case of low engagement/heterophily, where users’ explanations can be interpreted as efforts to depoliticise mostly media practices of communication and the consumption of content from the ‘Other’ side as responses to state narratives growing more ethno-centric (Hutchings & Szostek, 2015; Teper, 2016). These practices can be

viewed as attempts to de-securitise issues of ethnicity – language, country of origin and culture – in their manifestations through media practices (Trošt & Mandić, 2017).

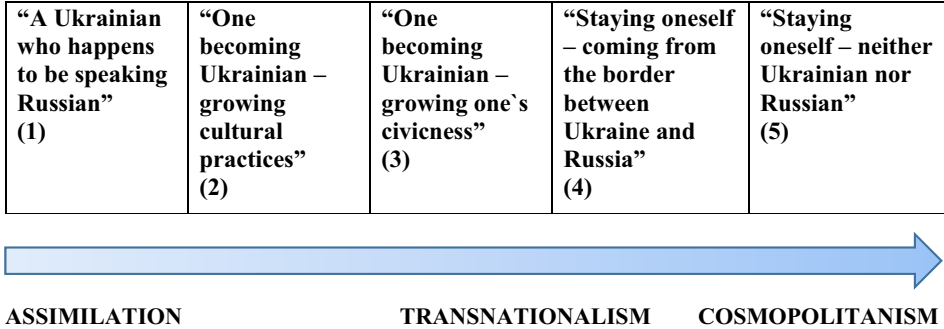


**Figure 3.** Mapping of digital media practices across dimensions of heterophily and engagement

The analysis of low engagement and high engagement transnational media practices supported the assumptions of Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2012) that entertainment activities bear lower levels of transformativity than such practices as news consumption. Communication with people from ‘the Other’ side was either politicised, or deliberately de-politicised by participants (as in **Study II**), which supports the conclusion that the conflict created a divide between the symbolic communities of Ukraine and Russia, and the communication domain remained a contentious negotiation territory for transnational users (**Study II**). The content creation domain provided space for users to not only re-conceptualise their hybridity in the emerging national identity narrative of Ukraine, but also to re-translate their views to the rest of the audience. We can assume that this is motivated by the post-conflict precariousness of the in-between position of the Russian-speaking participants (see also **Study II**).

The choice to construct a feed with a diversity of perspectives (‘to see what’s happening on the other side’) served to construct users’ identity narrative as *knowledgeable (media) citizens*, while in cases of high engagement homophily as *loyal supporters* of the country in conflict. Media practices were, therefore, securitised to a degree even on the lay level, although with significant room to manoeuvre for Russian-speaking Ukrainian users. The findings of **Study III** demonstrated a complex interaction between various pressures imposed on their practices online. This is not to say that their freedom was drastically limited, but rather that they were aware of how various factors shaped their public and semi-public activities.

Combining the results of **Study III** on the conceptualisation of cross-border practices and the construction of new citizen identities based on them with the findings of **Studies I and II** on the narrations of political change and how these narratives contributed to the shifting boundaries between national and ethnic identities in Ukraine suggests that a range of possible identity constructions emerged in the post-2013 context. These constructions are not breaks from previous dynamics of identity constructions that existed in Ukraine prior to the onset of the conflict, but reflect changes in configurations of normative, institutional and political elements in practice reproduction systems (Schatzki & Schatzki, 1996; Shove et al., 2015). I arranged the emerged identity constructions in a pattern of strategies for coping with social tensions brought on by the pressures of transnationalism and hybridity (Kwok-Bun & Plüss, 2013) to show different ways of negotiating partially incompatible loyalties in a polarised context (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Mapping of identification strategies of Russian-speaking Ukrainians

What changed with the conflict is that arguably it became increasingly more complicated and less beneficial (in terms of social capital) to maintain double identification and multiple loyalties for some participants. However, it also provided ways to incorporate one’s hybridity into the dominant narrative, while at the same time innovating overall content and construction. The paths included:

a) focusing on incorporating Russian elements into the essentialised under-

standing of Ukrainian identity (1), b) ‘developing’ one’s cultural competence as a Ukrainian (2), c) emphasising being a good citizen via a narrative placing Ukrainian civic values in opposition to Russian ‘undemocratic’ culture (3). In addition, the above narratives were supplemented by more hybrid and fluid conceptualisations of national identity (4,5). What’s important is that these conceptualisations are not completely mutually exclusive, and findings point to the conclusion that the negotiation process is still active. The figure demonstrates how these various identity narratives are positioned vis-à-vis the nation state: whether fully nested in it (1–3); mobile, moving between several national frames (4); or existing in opposition to the state structures (5).

## 7. DISCUSSION

This research has tackled a dual theoretical challenge. On one hand, it has addressed the tradition of studying the issue of Russian-speakers' identity in Ukraine from the structuralist and functionalist perspectives, separating them into a more distinct 'ethnic' group and emphasising the group's resistance to adopting linguistic and cultural practices (Arel & Khmelko, 1996; Janmaat & Piattoeva, 2007; Kulyk, 2001; Kuzio, 2001; G. Smith & Wilson, 1997). Arguably, this is an illustration of how the ahistorical approach to studying identity and group boundaries using Western narratives of 'ethnicity' and 'national unity' can overlook the intricacies of identity transformation, and collapse into abstracting the categories of agency and identity, conceptualising them as 'deviant' in relation to systemic change (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002).

A counter claim to that would be that following the events of 2013–2014 in Ukraine (protests and the conflict) the issue of the identity of Russian-speaking Ukrainians has been interpreted rather in the current Western multiculturalist framework, where researchers have leaned more toward highlighting the inclusive, civic bases of national identity. When these lenses are applied to Ukraine, the fragmented nature of Russian-speakers' identities and the multiple and porous boundaries between groups are brought to light. Most recently, Ukrainian scholars (Kulyk, 2017, 2018; Kuzio, 2015a, 2015b) have focused on re-incorporating Russian-speaking Ukrainians as a group within the national identity narrative and have, to some degree, attempted to de-securitise the issue of the Russian language. Kulyk (2017, 2018) claimed that Russian-speaking Ukrainians' identity is in transformation, and Ukraine overall is 'shedding Russianness'. I largely agree with the general conclusions that these studies have put forward as concerns the public discourse; however, I argue that they still approach identity in the Ukrainian context without considering what the concepts of 'nationality', 'ethnicity' and 'identity' actually *mean* to people, how they have been formed as a result of particular historical circumstances and exist to uphold societal structures. Now these concepts cannot be understood without considering the political and social circumstances that have led to a need for the re-consideration of 'identity' in Ukraine.

This study approaches the challenge of investigating identity ontologically and in a particular historical context through a framework that unites several concepts: *symbolic boundaries* (Lamont & Molnár, 2002) and *ontological narrativity* (Somers, 1994) emphasise the dynamics of border construction, rather than borders and groups themselves; *cultural trauma* (Sztompka, 2000a) provides a lens for looking at identity transformation in times of conflict; *social practice theory* (Couldry, 2012; Shove et al., 2012) and *transnationalism* (Vertovec, 2007) conceptualise group identity construction in the larger context of an intensifying state of super-diversity arising from the permeability of state borders, especially in the digital domain. The framework addresses a larger challenge of theorising identity construction in the context of conflict with a

larger, historically dominant state and the permeability of borders, where the competition between national identity narratives has higher stakes.

As a result of applying this framework, I reached the conclusion that while the results from the everyday level of identity performance generally support Kulyk's (2017, 2018) projections, 'shedding', i.e. the exclusion of, 'Russianness' proves to be much more nuanced and complex, thus encouraging a continuation of the discussion in more constructivist terms (following Korostelina, 2013; Knott, 2018). My research has shown that, as a result of the conflict, new configurations between basic national identity narrative elements, as understood in ontological terms, have emerged in Ukraine. These configurations have made it increasingly harder to maintain hybrid national identities for subjects from peripheral regions in Ukraine, and have facilitated the adoption of either Ukrainian or Russian national identity narratives.

The investigation of ontological narratives accompanying the Crimean annexation led to the identification of three distinct stories (of supporters, non-supporters and the ambivalent). The three narratives operate by selecting and emplotting events that happened in Ukraine and Russia over a long period of time: from the Soviet era through the 1990s and 2000s, the Maidan revolution (Revolution of Dignity), the annexation and the conflict in Donetsk and Luhansk in 2013–2014. Looking at the established narratives, supportive participants' accounts reflected on the newly established boundary breaking up the imagined 'Slavic' unity between Ukraine and Russia, while non-supportive participants were instead concerned with a newly actualised boundary *inside* the Crimean community, which undermined its integrity and denied the previous existence of the community in the minds of its residents. Both supporters and non-supporters negotiated their multiple loyalties in a changed environment and engaged in 'sense-making work' to conceptualise their ties with both states they were separated from and the polarised local communities they inhabited. In line with Sztompka's argument, the narratives of change mirrored larger public discourses, and relied heavily on widely circulated information, helping participants 'make sense' of their personal experiences (Sztompka, 2000a, 2004). The limited number of events that residents experienced, contextualised in larger narratives they were exposed to through media, provided material for the construction of ontological narratives: narratives that help people function as social actors (Somers & Gibson, 1993).

Ultimately, the peculiarity of the situation in Ukraine (and in Crimea, in this case) was not that people had to *choose sides*, but rather that they had to *construct sides*, as a result of changed material and symbolic circumstances, configurations of meaning attached to previous events, and shifts in meta-narratives (Somers and Gibson, 1993) that structured their social existence (living in peace vs living in conflict). The construction and constant consolidation of *borders* arose at the same time as the people's need to position themselves vis-à-vis these borders on a daily basis through mundane performative acts. The process of border construction and self-positioning happened in a compressed amount of time, and the identification targets were more dynamic than they

would be in a 'regular' stable society. That is why not only self-positioning practices, but also negotiation strategies in conjunction with everyday practices are worth including in the discussion, as they help explain fundamental concepts that underpin subjects' self-understanding. The meta-narratives of *progress*, *authenticity*, *globalisation* and the advancement of *individual rights* featured prominently in ontological narratives performed by the subjects, informing their views of state development (e.g. seeing both Ukraine and Russia as fleeing from the Soviet past) and self-work (what one needs to do to remain part of society). This is new input into the earlier discussions on Russian-speaking Ukrainians' conceptualisations of national and ethnic identity.

Ontological narratives that reflect the actualised boundaries between communities support previous assumptions that Knott (2018) made about the specific environments in peripheral regions in Ukraine where Ukrainian and Russian identity categories were collapsing. The conflict arguably made formerly overlapping identities of 'Ukrainians' and 'Russians' in the peripheral regions mutually exclusive: they could no longer easily be held at the same time. The main rift concerned values and policies, as reflected in the results of both Studies I and II, more than any linguistic/cultural practices. The protests of the Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014) were framed as a turn to a more democratic, civic-oriented society for more pro-Ukrainian participants, while they were interpreted as a complete rejection of 'common Slavic values' by pro-Russian participants, thus undermining the imagined 'Slavic (comm)unity' of Ukraine and Russia. In the context of the reinterpretation of the events of 2013–2014 and assigning new meanings to configurations of concepts (state-nationality-citizenship), new meanings were attributed to mundane practices, such as the language of communication and media practices. Ontological narratives acted as spaces where coping with the new environment happened, as well as attempts to re-negotiate the meaning of some practices.

Thus, both the protests of 2013 (the Revolution of Dignity) and the 2014 annexation of Crimea were emplotted in a configuration that contributed to a shift in the Ukrainian national identity discourse, and also in Russian-speaking Ukrainians' identity constructions. Arguably, a community cannot conceive of themselves as 'trans-border' or transnational if they do not interact with borders, if the borders don't exist or are extremely 'soft', which was the case before the conflict. The new context prompted the appearance of what can be seen as both 'reactive nationalism' (following Portes & Rumbaut's (2001) 'reactive ethnicity') and 'reactive transnationalism' (Redclift & Rajina, 2019).

Another aim of this research has been to look into the re-construction of the ontological security of members of a group faced with the sudden consolidation of borders and finds itself in a possibly precarious (as a result of the conflict) in-between position. As mentioned above, Russia acted as a dominant (in a cultural sense) power that permeated several life-spheres in Ukraine, including the media and culture. In this context, Russian-speaking Ukrainians did not experience a lack of social capital or a pressing need to re-negotiate their identities. On the other hand, the onset of the conflict led to border solidification and, it can be

argued, to a certain devaluation of the social capital of Russian-speaking Ukrainians. Having a multitude of options available, Russian-speaking participants had to choose strategies that would help them maintain comfort, subject integrity and access to social capital, and strike a delicate balance between aligning with the newly constructed symbolic borders and innovating them to integrate a new ‘Otherness’ into the mainstream, while maintaining coherence with previously held meta-narratives of individual freedom, authenticity and human progress.

Reflecting on the findings regarding changes in national and ethnic identity narratives and the performances of group boundaries in the context where borders didn’t exist before, I have suggested a scheme of different strategies of identity construction employed by the Russian-speaking Ukrainians (Figure 4). It re-conceptualises them according to the assumed symbolic relationship between hybrid subjects (Russian-speaking Ukrainians) and the state, following Kwok-Bun & Plüss’s (2013) classification of aligning cross-border loyalties in a polarised context. Following this logic, some conceptualisations of Russian-speaking Ukrainians’ identity are fully compatible with state frameworks and the dominant public narrative construction of national identity (Assimilation) and are generally followed by the consumption of Ukrainian media and some Russian language content that is not framed as having significance. Other conceptualisations attempt to reconstruct hybrid identities within the confines of the existing state narrative (Transnationalism), but innovate them by negotiating the meaning/significance attributed to various cross-border practices (i.e. speaking Russian, consuming Russian media content, maintaining cross-border ties and even combining citizenships). What is important is that the national identity, in this case, whether construed in cultural or civic terms, is seen as something to be negotiated and performed, not something inescapable. The last conceptualisation (Cosmopolitanism) rejects the hegemony of the state, the national framework and national/ethnic categories altogether, simultaneously framing the individual’s life as an attempt to escape institutional rules and narratives that enforce these frames. All three strategies are supported by larger meta-narratives that make them attractive to subjects who want to maintain social capital and ontological security, although the turbulent social context of Ukraine is more conducive to assimilation supported by state institutions and rules. But the findings of Study III also point to the existence of the tension suggested by Kwok-Bun & Plüss (2013) between transnationalism, which crosses and creatively combines elements from national frameworks (personal ‘transnational projects’), and cosmopolitanism, which rejects them altogether.

A more general conclusion following from Studies II and III is that Russian-speaking Ukrainians, despite partaking in cross-border practices and, in some cases, having transnational identifications, do not frame this as a barrier to being part of the titular majority and participating in performing and innovating the national identity narrative. Generally, subjects that could operate and provide interpretations of events in Ukraine using more general meta-narratives (global progress, civic engagement and nation-building) developed more resilient identity



practices that helped manage the ontological insecurity of the changed social situation. The loss of the previous state of ‘weaker’ borders and less prominent securitisation, then, was contextualised within the interpretation of the events of the Revolution of Dignity (either as a step of nation-building or as a victory of civic engagement and respect for human rights). To put it simply, those who gave positive meaning to the Revolution of Dignity either felt more comfortable adjusting their practices or possessed more agency to re-integrate themselves and their (now hybrid) practices into the new national identity narrative, which also served to support their social positions.

The findings of Study III suggest that the latter strategy can be interpreted in the light of suggestions by Redclift & Rajina (2019). They posit that the social strain of the conflict and shifts in the national narrative can prompt instances of both ‘reactive nationalism’ and ‘reactive transnationalism’ in the community, which, in the case of Ukraine, can be seen as an almost automatic response to the appearance of borders where previously there were none. In this case, I suggest the possibility of the existence of both pragmatic, ‘*disengaged*’ transnationalism, which is just a response to the solidification of borders, and a more intended, ‘*engaged*’ transnationalism, which is an attempt to make sense of border solidification by re-negotiating individual identity. The difference between disengaged and engaged transnationalisms then would lie in the degree of intent to affect the construction of the individual ontological and/or the national identity narrative through the performance of transnational practices.

In terms of a comparison with studies of Russian-speakers in the post-Soviet space, a conclusion that I propose is that Russian-speaking Ukrainians have much more agency in negotiating, re-producing and changing the national identity narrative than, for example, Russian-speakers in Estonia or Latvia (Vihalemm et al., 2019; Vihalemm & Juzefovičs, 2020), due to the conceptual differences in settings: blurred group boundaries, the interpretation of Euromaidan events in civic terms, and the historical entanglement of Ukrainian and Russian cultural practices that almost works to deconstruct their essentialistic inescapable quality. This should support a more nuanced approach to researching and comparing the group’s narratives and borders in the future. In this research, I also aim to advance the recent claims made by researchers of transnationalism to look at transnational groups and practices intersectionally and historically, paying specific attention to legal statuses, class and the state narrative framing of minorities/hybridity (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018; Parrado, 2017; Waldinger, 2017). I found that historical constructions of the concepts of ‘state’, ‘nation’ and ‘identity’, as well as particular meanings attributed to recent events (which are selected, emplotted and positioned in relation to other events chronologically and geographically) affect responses to social strain in the context of polarisation and existing diversity. Everyday practices and speech performances performed a multitude of functions in the context where the hybrid group (Russian-speaking Ukrainians) do not differ that much from the rest of the population in terms of legal status, socio-economic situation (though the IDP situation has altered that somewhat), access to cultural and social capital

etc. Everyday practices became objects of securitisation during the conflict, serving as instruments in border-construction processes. However, simultaneously, subjects co-opted their performance and non-performance in ontological sense-making work that helped them position themselves and re-establish their ontological security in the new context, and even innovate the new national identity narrative.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

This research looked into the dynamics of the production of narratives and, consequently, group distinctions in Ukraine by the Russian-speaking Ukrainians in the years following a wave of protests (the 2013 Revolution of Dignity) and the start of the conflict with Russia (2014). Ukraine presented an interesting case: a democratic post-Soviet country with arguably not very strong institutions or economy, a resulting tendency to societal polarisation and essentialisation of internal politics and national identity discourse, conflict-induced rapid national identity-building, ever-present hybridity of linguistic and cultural practices and porous borders between groups. For the purposes of clarity, I will repeat the research questions that unite the studies in a coherent framework, below:

***How has the construction of national identity of Russian-speaking Ukrainians changed in the context of the conflict with Russia?***

- 1. How do Russian-speaking Ukrainians reflect the political changes resulting from the conflict between Ukraine and Russia in their construction of national and ethnic identity?**
  - 1.1. How is the annexation of Crimea narrated by Crimean residents?
  - 1.2. How have symbolic boundaries between Ukraine and Russia been conceptualised and narrated by Russian-speaking Ukrainians since the start of the conflict?
- 2. How do the Russian-speaking Ukrainians' discourses around online media practices reflect the changes in their construction of Ukraine's national and ethnic identity in the context of the crisis?**
- 3. What role do transnational practices play in the identity construction of the Russian-speaking Ukrainians in the conflict context?**
  - 3.1. What transnational aspects can be found in the digital media practices of Russian-speaking Ukrainians?
  - 3.2. What role have these practices played in performing identity and civic engagement among Russian-speaking Ukrainians since the start of the conflict?
- 4. How can the study of transnational subjects' identity construction in the conflict context be approached theoretically?**

The main conclusions of the thesis are presented according to the structure of the research questions.

## **1. How do Russian-speaking Ukrainians reflect the political changes resulting from the conflict between Ukraine and Russia in their construction of national and ethnic identity?**

Both the accounts of Russian-speakers from Crimea (**Study I**) and from the eastern regions (**Study II**) show that the events of the Revolution of Dignity and the annexation are framed as ‘watershed moments’, regardless of one’s position, for the symbolic communities of Ukraine and Russia. The conflict was interpreted using frameworks that led to the start of a boundary-making process that Study I and Study II tracked through various narratives produced by the hybrid participants. The study’s conclusion is that the underlying tension behind opposing narratives of constructing some borders while deconstructing others ultimately concerned the content of the dominant Ukrainian national identity narrative. To put it briefly, the deconstruction performed by the Russian-speaking participants was mostly aimed at elements and practices framed as ‘cultural’ and ‘nationalistic’ (narrow), but not at civic ones. Conversely, civic elements actually provided an additional framework (in the context of opposition between ‘democratic Ukraine’ and ‘undemocratic Russia’) for solidifying the symbolic boundary between the two states.

### *1.1. How is the annexation of Crimea narrated by Crimean residents?*

The conclusions of **Study I** point to the fact that, while the demographic composition of the Russian-speaking community in Crimea remained the same, the solidification of borders prompted residents to connect their identifications much more closely with the national narratives of Ukraine or Russia, moving away from local-/region-based identifications.

I identified three more or less distinct narratives that emerged following the events of the annexation among the residents of Crimea. The narratives of the supporters and ambivalent participants were found to be rather similar, having Maidan (the 2013 Revolution of Dignity) as a central story element and stressing the traumatic feeling of the undermined image of unity between Ukraine and Russia. The narratives of the non-supporters focused on the loss of unity inside the Crimean community, and the military intervention as the traumatic core of the story.

### *1.2. How have symbolic boundaries between Ukraine and Russia been conceptualised and narrated by Russian-speaking Ukrainians since the start of the conflict?*

The research supported the assumption that events associated with the conflict in Ukraine prompted significant border solidification between the concepts of ‘Ukrainianness’ and ‘Russianness’ in the society. However, for the hybrid transnational subjects (Russian-speaking Ukrainians) the border solidification prompted two types of responses: acceptance of the solidification of (some) borders vs. negotiation/denial.

Different ways to frame the solidification caused the production of various strategies of border construction and deconstruction. The strategies of con-

struction included the following narratives: *These are different states* (emphasis on the formal state attributes, and public and historical narratives); *The people are different* (placing the Ukrainian and Russian populations in opposition to each other through dichotomisation of their characteristics); and *They represent different values* (framing the difference through the opposition of democratic vs. undemocratic).

The strategies of border deconstruction included: *Staying true to yourself* (Double Competence) (an emphasis on accepting and reaffirming one's hybrid dissenting characteristics), *Manipulation of the people* (a narrative of distrust in nationalism and denial of the politicisation of life practices), and *Particularisation* (deconstructing the concepts of 'Ukraine' and 'Russia' as holistic and homogeneous).

## **2. How do the Russian-speaking Ukrainians' discourses around online media practices reflect the changes in their construction of Ukraine's national and ethnic identity in the context of the crisis?**

While the conflict created conditions conducive to media homophily (active nation-building, distancing from Russia and a ban on Russian resources), the digital media practices showed that hybridity was still maintained through users' networks and other micro-level mechanisms. Far from being passive receivers of pressure, users exercised their agency by re-shaping their media environments to better suit their needs and identifications (unsubscribing, unfollowing or deleting friends and, ultimately, changing platforms). The analysis of rationalisation strategies for digital media practices focused on two main issues: *heterophily* in information channels and *engagement*. As a result of the analysis, I concluded that heterogeneous and homogeneous practices with high levels of engagement produced separate narratives of national identity in post-conflict Ukraine.

The choice to construct a feed with a diversity of perspectives ('to see what's happening on the other side') served as a basis for users' identity as *knowledgeable (media) citizens*, while in cases of high engagement homophily as *loyal supporters* of the country in conflict. Media practices were, therefore, securitised to a degree even on the lay level, although with significant room to manoeuvre for hybrid users.

## **3. What role did transnational practices play in the identity performance of the Russian-speaking Ukrainians in the conflict context?**

Based on the investigation of the conceptualisations and rationalisation strategies for transnational media practices performed in Study III, I found that transnational (heterogeneous) and country-bound (homogeneous) practices with high levels of engagement produced separate narratives of national identity in post-conflict Ukraine. Both viewed some digital media practices (posting, sharing news and other public digital activities) as constitutive expressions of their larger offline identities. However, practices characterised by high engagement

and homogeneity were rationalised through references to the need to ‘grow’ one’s Ukrainian identity and support the state, thus being *nation-centric*. High engagement heterogeneity, however, was rationalised through references to the universal human rights/values discourse, and national identity, in this narrative, was conceptualised using *post-national* frames.

#### **4. How can the study of transnational subjects’ identity construction in the conflict context be approached theoretically?**

In this research, I applied a framework that united several concepts to offer a more socio-historically-nested theoretical lens to study identity construction in societies undergoing drastic social change. The theoretical framework united concepts of *symbolic boundaries* (Lamont & Molnár, 2002) and *ontological narrativity* (Somers, 1994), *cultural trauma* (Sztompka, 2000a), and *transnationalism* (Vertovec, 2007). The framework has proven useful as it made it possible to focus on the dynamics of border construction, and avoid essentialising groups and borders as objects in themselves, as well as problematising identities and practices as ‘deviant’ from the processes of nation-building. The addition of concepts of ontological narrativity, cultural trauma and transnationalism (though these are rarely used together) made it possible to look at how identity narratives can act as spaces for coping with both drastic social change and conflict-induced polarisation, as well as the ever-increasing hybridity and permeability of state borders. Future, more comprehensive research could look into the shifting, overlapping and diverging boundaries between the concepts of ethnicity, nationality and citizenship in Ukraine: how the map of meanings of these concepts has changed since 2013–2014, and what implications for national development this might have. This study could then investigate how local and global discourses on nationality and citizenship have been adopted, co-opted and innovated by various actors in the context of Ukraine in recent years.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix I.

### Interview guiding notes. Fieldwork I (Crimea, 2016)

[in Russian]

Вступление об исследовании. Права участника, мои обязанности.

Возраст, пол, работа, положение в обществе, семья. Что изменилось в последнее время в этом плане?

Как давно Вы живете в Крыму?

А чем вы занимаетесь?

Какое у Вас образование?

У Вас есть хобби?

А можете как-то прокомментировать свой социальный статус? Например, средний класс?

А можете еще что-нибудь сказать о своем происхождении, национальном или этническом?

Давайте поговорим о недавних событиях в Крыму, об изменении его статуса. Что Вы можете об этом сказать в общем?

А можете как-то прокомментировать Ваши чувства? Что Вы чувствуете сейчас?

Как Вы узнали об изменении статуса Крыма? Как это происходило?

А какие чувства у Вас это вызывало в тот момент?

Оправдались ли Ваши ожидания?

Как бы Вы описали атмосферу в тот момент и сейчас в Крыму?

А как бы вы прокомментировали, как это все повлияло на Вас в материальном плане?

А что Вы можете сказать о границе? Как факт возникновения границы влияет на Вас?

Вы вините кого-нибудь в этом или нет?

А часто ли Вы думаете о жизни в Крыму до изменений?

На Вас как-то повлиял развал Советского Союза?

А события Оранжевой революции, Майдана, как вы их воспринимали?

Что бы Вы чувствовали, если бы в Крыму тоже были жертвы?

Когда в своей жизни Вы чувствовали себя в наибольшей безопасности?

У Вас есть родственники в Украине?

А в России?

И друзья?

А изменились ли как-то Ваше общение с ними?

А стало ли легче или тяжелее общаться с людьми в целом?

А изменилось ли что-то в плане общения на Вашей работе? Вы общаетесь с людьми на работе?

Были ли у Вас изменения в плане документов, страхования, больницы?  
Тяжелее или легче Вам жить?  
А содержать себя и свою семью?  
Как изменился Ваш интерес к политике и к окружающим событиям? Стало больше или меньше?  
Давайте поговорим о вопросе доверия. Доверяете ли Вы людям больше или меньше?  
Прокомментируйте, пожалуйста.  
Доверяете ли Вы государству? России?  
Как часто Вы вспоминаете о том, что случилось в течение одного дня?  
Беспокоитесь ли Вы о своей безопасности?  
А вот отношения в общем между украинцами и россиянами. Кажется ли Вам, что они стали более враждебными?  
Как Вы думаете, каким будет будущее Крыма?  
Легче или тяжелее планировать сейчас?  
Тяжелее, потому что нет уверенности того, что будет завтра.  
Чувствуете ли Вы, что мир стал более стабильным или менее стабильным и изменчивым?  
Кажется ли Вам, что Вы можете свободно высказываться, не ограничивая свои темы для разговора.  
Как Вы думаете, что украинцы думают о крымчанах и изменилась ли их точка зрения?  
А что россияне думают о крымчанах и как изменилось их мнение?  
Как Вам кажется, какие настроения царят в Крыму? О чем в основном говорят люди?  
А как они относятся к отключению электричества, к такого рода проблемам?  
К чему вы больше всего привязаны в жизни?  
Как Вам кажется, почему вообще все эти события произошли, присоединение Крыма? Ваша интерпретация?  
Чувствовали ли вы, что Вы далеки от политики в Киеве, живя в Крыму?  
Когда это все происходило?  
Видите ли Вы будущее своей семьи в Крыму?

## Interview guiding notes. Fieldwork II (Kyiv, 2018)

[English/Russian]

Исследователь (Елена Недожогина) гарантирует анонимность респондентов. Это означает:

- запись интервью останется конфиденциальной, даже при использовании отрывков текста имена будут заменены псевдонимами,
- то же самое относится к опубликованным результатам исследования (статья),
- при согласии, некоторые примеры из практик использования интернет медиа могут быть приведены в статье, но в измененном виде, не допускающем возможности идентификации автора.

Вступление

Возраст, пол, профессия, образование, регион происхождения.

Какой язык вы считаете своим родным языком? На каком языке вы говорите дома? На работе? На каком языке вы читаете новости, смотрите развлекательные передачи, фильмы, читаете книги?

Как часто и с кем вы используете украинский язык в общении? Что это за люди, на какие темы вы говорите?

Какие иностранные языки вы знаете?

Как часто и в каких ситуациях вы их используете?

Личность-идентичность

Что для вас самое главное в жизни – что определяет вас как личность?

С какой национальностью вы чувствуете самую глубокую связь? Есть ли разница – в культурном, социальном, политическом, других планах? Как вы проводите различия между собой и другими людьми (русскоязычными, россиянами, украинцами)? Назовите 3–5 характеристики русскоязычных в Украине вообще? Русских?

Что вас различает? Произошли ли какие-либо изменения в вашем понимании этих различий после 2014?

Изменилось ли это чувство после 2014?

Изменилось ли что-нибудь в вашей жизни после 2014? Пожалуйста, опишите события своей жизни после 2014. Изменилось ли ваше общение с другими людьми? То, какие новости\фильмы\газеты\книги вы читаете или смотрите?

Какие изменения в повседневной жизни (страны) вы замечаете?

Комфортно ли вам быть самим собой в Украине? Принимают ли люди вокруг вас таким, какой вы есть? Подумайте, пожалуйста, приходится ли вам менять свое поведение, чтобы быть «включенным», интегрированным в жизнь в Украине?

Как вы относитесь к идее украинской государственности? Что нужно человеку, чтобы быть\стать частью украинского общества? Является ли украинское общество, по вашему мнению, инклюзивным, или скорее наоборот?



Назовите что для вас важнее и почему: (гражданин Украины, украинец, русско-язычный, россиянин, житель Киева\другого города, славянин, профессия, др). Изменилось ли это после 2014?

#### Гражданскость

Как вы считаете, может ли человек изменить жизнь в стране к лучшему? Как? Чувствуете ли вы, что вы участвуете в жизни страны? Кажется ли вам, что вы политически\социально активны? Какими видами деятельности вы занимаетесь?

Изменилось ли это после 2014?

Что такое государство – для вас? Что такое – и для чего, гражданство? Государство – это помощник или скорее помеха?

Играет ли интернет какую-либо роль в вашей активности? Если да, то какие каналы?

#### Транснационализм

Как часто вы навещаете другие страны? Есть ли у вас родственники за границей?

Думаете ли вы когда-нибудь переехать за границу?

Как бы вы описали ваши отношения с родственниками за границей и в Украине? Как часто вы с ними общаетесь? По каким каналам? Какие темы вы обсуждаете? Обсуждаете ли вы политику?

Ездили ли вы за границу в последнее время? С какой целью? Есть ли какие то страны которые вы навещаете регулярно?

Сколько друзей у вас в различных социальных сетях? Могли бы вы обозначить на карте (описать), откуда они?

Кто они: друзья, коллеги, бывшие одноклассники, семья, родственники? На какие темы вы общаетесь с ними и как часто?

Видитесь ли вы с ними когда-нибудь лично?

Ваши друзья в социальных сетях – люди с похожими взглядами, или наоборот?

Приходилось ли вам встречаться с отличными от ваших взглядами в онлайн? Напр., удаляли ли вы когда-нибудь кого-нибудь из друзей из-за различия во взглядах?

Что вы думаете о таком утверждении: в наши дни люди могут жить параллельно\одновременно в 2 или 3 обществах (странах, регионах, городах). Как вам кажется – это возможно? Какие преимущества есть у такого стиля жизни? Проблемы? Как вам кажется – характеризует ли вас такой стиль жизни? На шкале от 1 до 7

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Совсем не подходит мне				очень хорошо меня характеризует		

## THINK ALOUD DEMONSTRATION

Давайте сыграем в игру. Представьте, что вы проснулись с утра. Вы берете свой ноутбук – каковы ваши дальнейшие действия? Пожалуйста, проговорите вслух, зачем вы делаете какие-либо действия.

### Общее использование медиа

Как бы вы описали себя как пользователя онлайн медиа? Пожалуйста, подумайте про интернет, социальные сети, новости, ютюб. В общем. Как часто вы используете их? Это похоже по контенту каналы (одинаковые точки зрения, страна происхождения?) Как вы относитесь к запрещению российских ресурсов?

Случились ли какие-то изменения после 2014? Смотрите ли вы те же новости, состоите ли в тех же группах, общаетесь ли с теми же людьми? Пожалуйста, запомните эти вопросы, когда мы будем обсуждать следующие темы.

## SKYPE

Как вы обычно общаетесь с людьми вне Украины: скайп, вайбер, другие приложения?

**(Для каждого канала):** С кем и как часто, какие темы вы обсуждаете и с какой целью?

Обсуждаете ли вы политику? События в Украине\России? Сходятся ли у вас мнения на разные события? Какого ваше мнение о событиях в Украине и Крыму?

С ЭТОГО МОМЕНТА МОЖНО СОПРОВОДИТЬ ДЕМОНСТРАЦИЯМИ  
(с согласия участника)

### Новости

Откуда вы получаете информацию о новостях? (конкретные источники)

В общем и целом, насколько хорошо вы осведомлены о событиях а) в Украине б) в вашем регионе в) в мире?

Насколько вы заинтересованы в политике? Заинтересованы ли вы в политике каких то конкретных стран? Украина? Россия? Как бы вы описали свой интерес к российской политике?

Темы

На каком языке вы читаете новости?

Как бы вы описали свой интерес к новостям в общем? Думаете ли вы, что быть в курсе событий важно\необходимо в современной жизни?

Какие темы вас интересуют больше всего? Пожалуйста, опишите, как активно вы следите за новостями по этим темам?

Почему?

Как вы думаете, возможность читать новости на нескольких языках – это преимущество или недостаток?

Социальные медиа\группы

О чем (какие темы) вы обычно читаете на ФБ\ВК\других соц медиа? Они больше национальные, региональные, местные?

Почему, как вы думаете?

Как вам кажется – можете ли вы доверять информации на этих сайтах? Что вообще заставляет вас верить чему-либо? Что вызывает у вас недоверие?

Используете ли вы какую-нибудь информацию из интернета в своей жизни? На какие странички вы подписаны? Откуда эти странички? Они местные или скорее зарубежные? Как вы выбираете странички, на которые подписываетесь? Какие являются вашими самыми любимыми?

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Пожалуйста, опишите ФБ, ВК и ОК. Какими вы пользуетесь, что вам нравится\не нравится в этих СМ? Какой ваш самый любимый? Есть ли что-нибудь, что отличает их друг от друга? Используете ли вы их для разных целей? Для каких? В каких случаях вы пользуетесь этими сайтами? У вас те же самые или разные друзья на этих сайтах? Отличается ли контент, который вы читаете на этих сайтах?

Вы постите что-нибудь в сетях? Лайкate? Пишите комментарий? Делитесь? Загружаете свои фотографии? Общаетесь онлайн с друзьями? Какими еще способами вы выражаете себя и свое мнение онлайн? Комментируете ли вы новости, пишете блог? Почему?

Пожалуйста, выберите несколько постов (на своей стене или в группах), которые

А) больше всего характеризуют вас как личность,

Б) собрали больше всего лайков,

В) больше всего вам нравятся.

Используете ли вы: Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn? Почему?

Как часто?

Что вы делаете на этих сайтах: вы активны (постите, отвечаете, комментируете) или нет?

Используете ли вы соц сети, чтобы узнавать новости? Когда, при каких обстоятельствах?

Пишите ли вы свой блог – в твиттере или ФБ? Читаете ли вы то, что пишут другие люди?

Подписаны ли вы на каких-нибудь знаменитостей в интернете? Они метсные или зарубежные? Пытаетесь ли вы с ними общаться или только наблюдаете?

## YOUTUBE

Как вы пользуетесь ютубом? Есть ли какой то контент, за которым вы постоянно следите? Конкретные каналы? Почему именно эти?

Какой развлекательный контент на ютубе вы смотрите? Знаменитости? Почему? Смотрите ли вы телевизионные каналы и передачи на ютубе? Какие передачи являются вашими любимыми и почему?

Вы когда нибудь производили контент сами? Почему?

Интересны ли вам украинские\российские\другие шоу талантов, и почему?

## Поисковик

Каким поисковиком вы пользуетесь? Почему?

## Почта

Сколько разных имейлов у вас есть? Используете ли вы их для разных целей? Какой вам больше всего нравится и почему?

## Фильмы

Закачивали ли вы недавно какие-нибудь фильм через интернет? Какие?

ТВ шоу или программы?

Ваш любимый жанр фильмов, актеры, режиссеры? Западные, российские, украинские?

Ваши пожелания.

## Appendix II. Informed consent form

### ФОРМА СОГЛАСИЯ УЧАСТНИКА

*Hybrid/transnational practices of media audiences in Ukraine*

*Вы приглашены принять участие в исследовательском проекте докторанта Университета Тарту, Института Социальных Исследований, Елены Недожогиной. Прежде чем выразить свое согласие/несогласие, важно, чтобы вы поняли тему исследования и условия участия.*

#### **Цель проекта**

Целью проекта является исследование (онлайн) медиа практик и способов самовыражения представителей разных групп населения в Украине. Ваше участие поможет пролить свет на то, как люди используют различные каналы интернета для самоутверждения своей идентичности.

#### **Ваши права и анонимность**

Участие в исследовании (интервью) является анонимным и добровольным, и может быть прекращено в любой момент интервью.

#### **Конфиденциальность и анонимность гарантируются на всех стадиях исследования.**

Проект подчиняется международным стандартам, которые гарантируют анонимность. Записи, сделанные в процессе интервью, будут храниться в защищенных паролем папках на сервере университета. Запасные копии будут храниться в оффлайн режиме. Доступ ко всем файлам будет принадлежать только исследователю. Записи будут архивированы на сервере университета только на время проведения проекта, и будут уничтожены в течение 12 месяцев после его окончания.

Вся информация будет анонимизирована. Это означает, что для защиты ваших прав, ни ваше имя, ни имена ваших знакомых/друзей/упомянутых вами людей не будут опубликованы. Вместо этого, псевдонимы будут использованы, любая чувствительная информация будет заменена на X, скриншоты не будут использоваться.

Этические принципы, описанные выше, соответствуют международным стандартам.

Анонимизированная информация будет использована для написания различных публикаций. Если вы хотите получить копии, обратитесь к исследователю.

#### **Что от вас требуется:**

- 1) Участие в интервью (1–1.5 часов)
- 2) При согласии, исследователь может попросить вас продемонстрировать некоторые медиа практики, напр. показать обычную рутину использования

социальных сетей, активности в группах, либо чтения новостей в интернете. В процессе демонстрации, исследователь может только делать пометки и записи, но не скриншоты. В последствии, данная информация может быть использована только в обобщенном/измененном виде.

### **Подпись**

Чтобы подтвердить, что вы согласны на участие в проект и осведомлены о своих правах и обязанностях, подпишите ниже.

Имя и подпись:

Имя интервьюера:

Дата:

Спасибо!

---

При наличии любых вопросов обращайтесь к исследователю:

Главный исследователь

Olena Nedozhogina, doctoral student

Olena.nedozhogina@ut.ee

## SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

### Venekeelsete ukrainlaste identiteediloomed pärast 2013–2014-nda aasta sündmusi

Doktoritöö käsitleb venekeelsete ukrainlaste identiteediloomed muutusi pärast Maidani proteste ning selle järgnenud konflikti Venemaal. Tugineda kollektiivse identiteedi sotsioloogilistele ja etnograafilistele käsitlustele ning venekeelsete ukrainlastega läbiviidud intervjuudele. Selgitan Krimmist ja Ida-Ukrainast pärit venekeelsete ukrainlaste individuaalsete identiteedinarratiivide kujunemist ning strateegiaid 'meie' ja 'nende' grupi vaheliste sümbolsete piiride ümberkonstrueerimisel.

Teoreetiliselt problematiseerin oma töös rahvusliku identiteedi seniseid universalistlikke käsitlusi Ukraina uuringutes ning soovitan kasutada ajaloolisemat, konkreetse aja ning kohaga seotud käsitlusviisi (Somers ja Gibson 1993). Minu käsitlus lähtub subjektide sotsiaalsetest suhetest konkreetsetel ajahetkedel ning nende meediakasutusest ja kollektiivset mälu kujundavate institutsionaalsete praktikate muutuse analüüsist. Olen sünteesinud kultuurilise trauma, ontoloogilise narratiivsuse ning sümbolsete piiride käsitlusi, mõtestamaks 'rohujuure tasandil' toimuvaid igapäevaseid identiteediloomed protsesse. Samuti olen oma analüüsis arvestanud venekeelsete ukrainlaste piiriüleste, hargmaiste meediakasutuse- ja suhtluspraktikatega, mida Ukraina-Venemaa konflikt tugevasti mõjutab.

Minu uuringute tulemused näitavad, et nii Krimmi kui Ida-Ukraina venekeelsete elanike identiteediloomed on Maidani murrangulised sündmused ning Ukraina-Venemaa konflikt tugevasti mõjutanud. Sõltumata isiklikest poliitilistest eelistustest konstrueerivad inimesed uusi sümbolseid piire rahvarühmade ja riikide vahel ning „unustavad” varasemaid piire, püüdes suhestuda uue Ukraina identiteedinarratiiviga. Inimesed ei rõhuta enda identiteedinarratiivides kultuurilisi ja etnilise päritolu elemente, tõlgendades neid kui väheolulisi ning toovad esile tsiviil-rahvuslikke, demokraatiaga seotud elemente, rõhutamaks uut sümbolset piiri „demokraatliku Ukraina” ja „ebademokraatliku Venemaa” vahel.

Hargmaiste meediakasutus- ja suhtluspraktikatega venekeelsete ukrainlaste reaktsioonid avalikus poliitilises retoorikas tugevasti eristatud „ukrainluse” ja „venelikkuse” käsitlustele olid nõ läbirääkivad. Mõningaid uusi piiride-tõmbamisi võeti omaks ja haarati enda identiteedinarratiividesse, mõnede uute piiritõmbamiste vastu aga protestiti. Tuvastas kolm põhinnarratiivi: Ukraina toetajate ja ambivalentse poliitilise lojaalsusega venekeelsete narratiivid keskendusid mõlemad Maidani revolutsioonilistele sündmustele (orig. Революція гідності) kui sümbolsele keskpunktile ning Ukraina-Vene ühtsuse kuvandi lagunemisest tekkinud traumaatilise kogemusele. Ukraina rahvusliku poliitika mittetoetajate narratiivide traumaatiline tuum oli Krimmi kogukonna ühtsuse lõhkumine ning sõjaline sekkumine.

Kui Ukraina riiklikus poliitikas Venemaa meedia keelustati, siis venekeelsed ukrainlased säilitasid isiklikud sotsiaalmeedia võrgustikud ning jälgisid paljudel juhtudel edasi ka Venemaa meediakanaleid, säilitades enda hargmaise ja geolopoliitiliste ideoloogiate seisukohalt hübriidse meediatarbimise. Samas kujundasid inimesed ise aktiivselt oma sotsiaalmeedia võrgustikke ja kasutusviise ümber vastavalt identiteediloomes toimunud muutustele: mõningate sotsiaalmeedia tuttavatega suhtlemine lõpetati, mõningate kanalite jälgimisest loobuti jms. Eesmärk luua mitmekesiste vaatenurkadega personaalne infovoog („näha, mis teisel pool toimub“) ja teadliku meediakodaniku rolli loomine moodustas olulise osa uuest identiteediloomest. Venemaa-suunalist meediakasutust nähti võimaliku ohuna, kuid püüti seda leevendada läbi individuaalse allikate ja suhtlusstrateegiate varieerimise, mitte läbi Venemaa meediasfääri täieliku väljalülitamise.



## **PUBLICATIONS**

## CURRICULUM VITAE

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2017–2020 PhD studies in Media and Communications, University of Tartu  
2014–2016 MA studies in Baltic Sea Region Studies, University of Tartu  
2010–2014 BA studies in International Relations, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

### Work experience:

2019–2020 University of Melbourne, Sessional Academic Staff  
2019–2020 University of Melbourne, Research Assistant  
2016–... University of Tartu, Faculty of Social Sciences, Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, Project Manager-Analyst  
2015–2016 University of Aarhus, Research Assistant (data collection)

### Publications:

Nedožhogina, Olena (2019). A Bitter Divorce: Narratives of Crimean Annexation and their Relation to Larger State Identifications. *Europe Asia Studies*, 71 (7), 1069–1090.10.1080/09668136.2019.1634677.  
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2010–2014 Taras Shevchenko Kiievi Rahvus Ülikool, Rahvusvahelised suhted, bakalaureuse õpe

### **Teenistuskäik:**

2019–2020 Melbourne'i ülikool, sessiooniline akadeemiline personal2019 – 2020 Melbourne'i ülikool, teadusassistent  
2016–... Tartu Ülikool, Sotsiaalteaduste valdkond, Johan Skytte poliitika-uuringute instituut, projektijuht-analüütik  
2015–2016 Aarhusi ülikool, teadusassistent

### **Publikatsioonid:**

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