"Suitcase – Shelling – Russia": Narratives about Refugees from Ukraine in Russian media

Natalia Moen-Larsen, Doctoral Research Fellow, Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo natalia.moen-larsen@sosgeo.uio.no

Abstract

The armed conflict in South-East Ukraine has brought a massive increase in refugees in the Russian Federation. This article examines the meaning-making process surrounding the sudden presence of these refugees, through analysis of narratives in three major national newspapers – *Izvestiya*, *Novaya gazeta* and *Rossiiskaya gazeta* –1 June–30 September 2014. Three thematic groups of narratives predominated: about *war* (legitimising the presence of refugees in Russia), about *refugee reception and aid* (it is morally correct to help the refugees), and about *Russia in international relations* (refugees as background characters in grand narratives about geopolitical interests and global power games). These give meaning to the subject-position "refugees from Ukraine" primarily as war victims and aid recipients.

Keywords: Russia, refugees from Ukraine, narratives, media, conflict in Ukraine

Introduction

In the years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the border between Ukraine and the Rostov region (*oblast*) in Russia "was only demarcated on the map" (Racheva 2014, 9): it did not have any physical presence, and people moved freely back and forth. Then, in May 2014, insurgents announced referendums on self-determination in Donbass, an area in South-East Ukraine (the Donetsk and Lugansk regions). [1] These referendums triggered a civil war in Ukraine. Since then, the border to Russia has become a crossing point for refugees, insurgents, Russian volunteers and military equipment. Refugees from Ukraine are today the largest refugee population in Russia (UNHCR 2018). With the armed conflict in Donbass, the official number of refugees in the Russian Federation rose from 3,400 in 2012 to 231,800 in 2014 (UNHCR 2014, 10) – an extraordinary increase, forcing Russians to make sense of the new situation and adjust to the presence of newcomers.

It is important to know more about the relatively new group of refugees coming from South-East Ukraine. Although there exist some studies published in Russian (e.g. Chervinskaya 2014; Antip'ev 2015; Stegnii and Antip'ev 2016, 2015; Podlesnaya and Khomutova 2016; Gulina and Poznyak 2018; Kuznetsova 2018), this article fills a gap in the English-language literature, where only a handful of recent studies have focused on refugees from Ukraine (Lassiala 2017; Myhre 2018; A'Beckett 2019; Moen-Larsen 2019). In addition, this article makes important contributions to two research fields – Russia studies, and refugee studies – by nuancing the literature on Russian media representations of the conflict in Ukraine, and by addressing the implications of national narratives for refugee reception in a country.

In this study, I explore the meaning-making process surrounding refugees from Ukraine, through an analysis of narratives that circulated in Russian newspapers in the period 1 June – 30 September 2014. I analyse the meaning generated through these narratives, asking how the subject-position of "refugee" has been constructed. What were the narratives? Who was narrating? How were refugees positioned? What attitudes towards refugees from Ukraine were cultivated in the Russian media in summer and early autumn 2014? This timeframe seeks to capture the narratives formed in the immediate aftermath of the refugee influx from Ukraine. The conflict came as a shock to many Russians, and images of Ukraine had to be radically readjusted. In the summer of 2014 Russian authorities, the media and the public found themselves trying to make meaning of this new phenomenon that no one – not the Russian government, or society, or law – had been prepared for.

The immediate backdrop was the internal disagreement about Ukraine's association with the European Union and with the Eurasian Economic Union that led to the Euromaidan revolution in February 2014, when President Viktor Yanukovych was ousted and the Ukrainian government overthrown.[2] In Russian political discourse, this revolution was used to justify the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in March 2014. After the annexation, and immediately prior to the election of Petro Poroshenko as president of Ukraine, a rebellion erupted in the pro-Russian Lugansk and Donetsk regions of South-East Ukraine. On 11 May 2014, the regions held a referendum on self-determination, resulting in overwhelming support for independence in Donetsk (89%) and Lugansk (96%) (Sakwa, 2015: 154). The Ukrainian state responded with an Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) in Donbass, leading to an armed conflict between the Ukrainian military forces and the insurgents, still ongoing today. For the period April 2014–February 2019, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for

Human Rights (OHCHR) recorded 3,023 civilian deaths; the number of injured civilians was estimated to exceed 7,000 (OHCHR 2019, 6).

This conflict has brought a humanitarian catastrophe – as of July 2018, the government of Ukraine had registered more than 1.5 million people as internally displaced (UNHCR 2019a); the number of Ukrainians who have fled to the Russian Federation since 2014 is estimated to exceed 400,000 (UNHCR 2019b). From the beginning, this essentially domestic crisis became internationalised, with Russia supporting the Donbass insurgents and the West supporting the Ukrainian authorities (Sakwa 2015, 148). This Western involvement has been widely discussed in the Russian social media, newspapers and on television (Gaufman 2017, 78).

Research on Russian media and journalism in the context of the conflict in Ukraine has focused on the dissemination of fake news, propaganda and its being part of an information war (e.g. Bonch-Osmolovskaya 2015; Gerber and Zavisca 2016; Kazun 2016; Khaldarova and Pantti 2016; Gaufman 2017; Szostec 2017; Baysha 2018). Studies exploring the "strategic narratives" employed by the Russian authorities find that the Russian leadership views the projection of narratives to foreign and domestic audiences as a matter of national security. These studies point out that the conflict in Ukraine has reinforced pre-existing anti-Western narratives in Russian political and media discourse. Also emphasised is the recurrent enemy image of Ukrainian radicals found in Russian coverage of the conflict (Hansen 2015; Hutchings and Szostek 2015; Gaufman 2017, 103–123).The Russian leadership uses such narratives strategically to legitimise its behaviour in the eyes of the public and to strengthen the image of Russia as a great power (Ostevik 2017; Szostec 2017a,b). However, Hutchings and Szostec (2015, 194) note that "the visceral anti-western rhetoric is not as undifferentiated as is often suggested", and that Russia still wishes to position itself as a *European* nation.

In this article, I examine Russian media representations of the conflict in Ukraine from a different angle. Rather than looking at strategic narratives and questions about security, I explore the nuances in the Russian-mediated narratives about the conflict in Ukraine, seeking to introduce a focus on the people whose lives have arguably been affected the most – the refugees from Ukraine. In addition to being part of stories about the conflict in Ukraine, these representations of refugees from Ukraine are connected to dominant perceptions about migrants in general. Immigrants broadly defined are one way in which to tackle Russia's demographic crisis, and it can thus be argued that Ukrainian refugees are particularly sought

after as a way of preserving the Slavic core of the nation.[3] In Russia, in recent years there has been a tendency to distinguish between "preferred" and "non-preferred" migrants – Slavs (for example, Ukrainians), in the former group and Muslims from Central Asia in the latter (Abashin, 2017, 27, 31; Lassila 2017, 61–63). This tendency is evident in a new study of Russian refugee representations in 2014 and 2015 (Moen-Larsen 2019), showing contrasting depictions of refugees from Ukraine and refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. Russian newspapers represent the latter as threatening, alien and barbarians, whereas Ukrainians are perceived as culturally and ethnically close to Russians and therefore as refugees to be welcomed in Russia. In the present article I follow up with a detailed account of how the subject position of "Ukrainian refugee" is represented as "our responsibility" in three Russian newspapers.

Data

In this article I examine material gathered from Russian newspapers as "collective representations of truthfulness" (Alexander in Lynch and Sheldon 2013, 263). Media texts circulate very rapidly, informing readers about happenings in the world. Because most people have little first-hand experience, they must lean on the media for interpretations (ibid.). Such collective representations are an important part of the meaning-making processes that inform our actions.

The focus here is on three Russian national newspapers – *Izvestiya, Novaya gazeta* and *Rossiiskaya gazeta* – and their narratives featuring refugees from Ukraine. In September 2018, the Russian media monitoring company Mediologiya (2018) rated all three newspapers among the five most influential Russian newspapers, based on the number of citations. *Izvestiya* was rated as number one, *Rossiiskaya gazeta* as number four and *Novaya gazeta* as number five. All three are based in Moscow, but differ in terms of content, news angle and relationship with the government. *Izvestiya* is a pro-government newspaper that publishes reports on current affairs in Russia and abroad. *Novaya gazeta* is known for its government-critical position and investigative reporting. *Rossiiskaya gazeta* is the official daily of the government of the Russian Federation and it is authorised to be the first to publish information about new laws and executive enactments, in addition to reporting on internal and international affairs. The circulation numbers for the printed versions of the three newspapers

are 84.870 for *Izvestiya* (*Izvestiya* 2019), 111.371 for *Novaya gazeta* (*Novaya gazeta* 2019) and 130.535 for *Rossiiskaya gazeta* (*Rossiiskaya gazeta* 2019).

Television and the internet are the main sources of news in Russia (Levada-Center 2016). I have chosen to analyse printed newspapers because of their accessibility and the possibility to do download a large number of texts based on word searches. Part of the reasoning behind my choice of *Izvestiya* and *Rossiiskaya gazeta* was the wish to access pro-government narratives that might be similar to stories presented on the state-owned television channels, whereas the oppositional newspaper *Novaya gazeta* can be assumed to carry stories that also can be found in other oppositional sources of news online.

I have used the database East View Information Services to collect all texts that mentioned refugees from Ukraine[4] and were published in the print versions of *Izvestiya*, *Novaya gazeta* and *Rossiiskaya gazeta* in June–September 2014. The choice of "refugee" as the main keyword in the data gathering sets the limits for the analysis. For example, adding the terms "migrant", "compatriot" or "migrant-workers" to the search would have yielded other Russian narratives about migrants from Ukraine. However, since one purpose of this analysis is to explore how *refugees* are positioned in different narratives, I chose to limit the analysis to narratives that explicitly mention refugees.

The analysis here is based on 314 texts – 70 from *Izvestiya*, 74 from *Novaya gazeta* and 171 from *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. Although the Donbass status referendums that triggered large-scale armed conflict in South-east Ukraine were organised in May 2014, my data indicate that the massive influx of refugees from Ukraine to Russia started in June 2014. In May 2014, only seven articles published in the three newspapers mentioned refugees, in stark contrast to the 74 articles mentioning refugees that were published in June that year.

The data sample from *Izvestiya* consists solely of news articles (55) and opinion pieces (15); the other two newspapers show greater variety. More the half of the texts in *Novaya gazeta* are report accounts (39); the remainder are news articles (25), interviews (4), opinion pieces (4), and one letter to the editor. The sample from *Rossiiskaya gazeta* consists of news articles (110), interviews (26), reportages (18), opinion pieces (11), letters to the editor (5) and one decree. This variation in indicate a plurality of actors who get to tell their stories in the three newspapers, with a potential for a diversity in the stories about refugees included in my data

sample. For example, *Novaya gazeta* is an outlet for alternative articulations: it has the most quotes from refugees in the data sample – but only a few quotes from representatives of the Russian government, and none at all from President Putin. The texts from *Izvestiya* and *Rossiiskaya gazeta* often quote government officials, the President and the Prime Minister as well as representatives of various political parties. The opinion pieces in all three newspapers offer the views of experts and pundits.

Theory and method

This study combines concepts from cultural sociology, structuralism and post-structuralism. Drawing inspiration from cultural sociology, I view texts as carriers of cultural beliefs. From structuralism, I examine the narratives – the *stories* – in the texts and explore their structure. Finally, from post-structuralism I adopt the idea that meaning is never fixed, and that language is "a site of variability, disagreement and potential conflict" (Burr 2003, 54). If the goal is to understand the production of meaning in a given society, then narratives distributed by the press offer a fruitful starting point. Texts are received and interpreted by audiences, who in turn produce new texts based on them. "In this ongoing textual reading and production, the history, or histories of a society unfold" (Thwaites et al. 2002: 117).

A narrative can be defined as an account of a sequence of events where the causal links between the events are based on a *plot* that *has characters* (Polletta et al. 2011, 111; Tanum and Krogstad 2014, 250). These characters are often represented in a binary way: hero versus a villain, or subject (the protagonist) vs opponent (the antagonist) (e.g. Greimas 1987). The two are usually involved in a conflict with each other over a desired object – not necessarily a physical thing: it may be an idea, like "democracy" (Rafoss 2015). As the meaning of a narrative is context-dependent, the historical and cultural contexts are important for the analysis (Tanum and Krogstad 2014, 254). For example, all countries that took part in the Second World War have cultural narratives about the war – but the stories told in, say, Berlin, Hiroshima, and in Moscow are not the same. We all interpret the world around us by leaning on familiar narratives. Reading news about refugees, we interpret them in light of other stories about refugees that we have heard before.

It can be useful to combine narratives with the concept of "subject-position" (Tanum and Krogstad 2014). In discourse theory, "the subject" is the same as "subject-positions" in a

discursive structure (Laclau and Mouffe 2014, 101). We may occupy several subject positions in differing contexts, and these positions influence our experience of identity (Davies and Harré 2007). For example, when, in a conversation, we position a woman from Ukraine as a "refugee", she in turn must engage with this subject-position – identifying herself as being a refugee, or not. In either case, the meaning infused in this position is important.

Narrative analysis offers tools for analysing characters who find themselves locked in a narrative structure. Take, for example, the case of a Russian aid worker (protagonist) in conflict with the Ukrainian armed forces (antagonist) who are obstructing him in his work of getting humanitarian aid to internal refugees in a temporary accommodation camp in Donbass. The concept of "subject-position" enables greater flexibility and flow in the meaning-making process. Depending on the context, a refugee (subject-position) may be placed in the role of protagonist or antagonist in a narrative – or as a supporting character (waiting for aid at a temporary accommodation camp in Donbass). Thus, protagonist/antagonist are parts of a binary system which can be further nuanced by a focus on subject-positions.

To answer the research questions and to identify the structure of the narratives that feature refugees in my data, I focus explicitly on *the plot* (what happens in the narrative)[5] and *the characters* (protagonist, antagonist and the source of the conflict between them). I also investigate how the refugees from Ukraine are *positioned* in the different plotlines identified. Further, I identify *the morals* of the narratives – the underlying messages in the stories – and the attitudes cultivated towards these refugees when they are represented in specific ways.

Narratives have the power to form how we think and act, but the opportunities to get one's story heard are not equally distributed in society (Johannessen et al. 2018: 110). Not everyone can tell his or her story in a newspaper. Factors like editorial practice, and censorship and self-censorship (especially in the Russian context) influence which stories end up in print. I have sought to deal with this challenge through the selection of data, sampling both pro-government and oppositional newspapers and including stories told by refugees, volunteers and government representatives. In addition, throughout the analysis, I keep track of the actors telling these stories – *the narrators* –and discuss the connections between specific stories and those who tell them.

Analysis of the narratives

"Suitcase – Shelling– Russia", the title of this article, is also the title of a news story published in *Rossiskaya gazeta* in July 2014 that describes how the Russian Federation is helping refugees from Ukraine (Borisov, *Rossiskaya gazeta* 2014). This title has several layers of meaning: it refers to the Soviet legacy as well as to anti-Russia sentiments. In 1980 and 1990, nationalist groups from the former Soviet countries used the slogan "Suitcase – Train station – Russia" to challenge the Russian-speaking population, for example in Moldova (Isachenko 2012, 57). This slogan has since been used to indicate that people who live in post-Soviet states and who are nostalgic for the Soviet past are free to go to Russia. In the winter 2013/14 it was one of the slogans at the Euromaidan protests. On 15 March 2014, immediately before the annexation of Crimea by Russia, *The Guardian* published this statement by Sergei Kiselev, head of the Department of Political Geography at Simferopol University in Crimea: "They tell us that if we don't like living in Ukraine we should pack our bags: 'Suitcase, train station, Russia', goes the saying. Well, we finally are leaving for Russia. But we're taking the train station and the rest of the region along with us" (in Walker and Salem 2014)

By replacing "train station" with "shelling" *Rossiskaya gazeta* has added another layer of meaning to this slogan. In its new form, this slogan implies that the conflict is escalating, that people are forced to leave Ukraine for Russia and become refugees. Further, the order of the three words "suitcase", "shelling", "Russia" points to the plot, the sequence of events, that is part of Russian narratives about refugees from Ukraine. Refugees pack their suitcases; they are fired at on the way to the Russian border; finally, they find refuge in Russia.

Although I used the term "refugee" in searching for texts to include in the data sample, refugees are not necessarily the main protagonists in the narratives that came up, but they are always part of the cast. Three thematic groups of narratives featured refugees from Ukraine and dominated the pages of *Izvestiya*, *Novaya gazeta* and *Rossiiskaya gazeta* in the summer of 2014 – narratives about *war,* about *refugee reception and aid,* and about *Russia in international relations*. These themes became apparent after several rounds of meticulous reading and coding of the data. First, all articles underwent preliminary coding and manual sorting, with a focus on the overarching theme of each article and the portrayal of refugees. Next, the data were uploaded in NVivo, and a more elaborate coding scheme was developed, to identify core topics, locations, narrators and characters in the texts. Gradually, I became aware of the recurrence of the three themes to be discussed in this analysis.

In order to be sure of this finding, I sorted the data into thematic groups of narratives. There are intricate intertextual connections between the texts; the authors often combine several narratives and plotlines. In Table 1, these narratives are separated for analytical purposes. For simplicity, only the dominant narrative in each article has been counted.

Table 1. Thematic groups of narratives in *Izvestiya*, *Novaya gazeta* and *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, June–September 2014

Thematic groups of narratives	*Izvestiya*		*Novaya gazeta*		*Rossiiskaya gazeta*		SUM	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
War	11	*16*	28	*38*	48	*28*	**87**	*28*
Refugee reception and aid	35	*50*	22	*30*	84	*49*	**141**	*45*
Russia/international relations	20	*28*	8	*11*	18	*11*	**46**	*14*
Other	4	*6*	15	*21*	21	*12*	**40**	*13*
SUM	**70**	*100%*	**73**	*100%*	**171**	*100%*	**314**	*100%*

45% (141 texts) of the articles position refugees from Ukraine in stories about reception and aid, and 28% (87 texts) in a plot about war, whereas 14% (46) of the texts are grand narratives about Russia in international relations, and refugees in that context. This fits in with two of the subject-positions available to refugees from Ukraine in Russia: as victims of war and as aid recipients (Moen-Larsen 2019). Further, 13% of the data involve other narratives: popular or high culture (10 texts), the Orthodox Church (5), internal affairs in Russia (5), propaganda (4), work migration (3), internal affairs in Ukraine (3), business (2), Crimea (2), security (2), nationalism (1), Beslan (1), education (1), peace in Ukraine (1). After sorting the narratives in the data into thematic groups I became more certain: in the summer of 2014, the complex issue of refugees from Ukraine was made comprehensible to Russian audiences largely through the prisms of *war, reception/aid* and *international relations.*

The narratives begin in various ways. For instance, stories about war might start in Donbass, "We lived right in the centre of Lugansk"[6] (Refugee in Girin, *Novaya gazeta* 2014).[7] Stories about refugee reception and aid often open with "When the flow of refugees to Russia began"

(editor-in-chief of *Amurskaya Pravda* in Novoselova and Yakovleva, *Rossiiskaya gazeta* 2014*)*. Finally, stories about international relations feature states, not individuals, as main characters, as with "[Ukraine] has fallen into bloody conflict" (Putin in Sozaev-Gur'ev, *Izvestiya* 2014). These three ways of starting the story signal different developments in the plotlines and a contrast in how much each narrative focuses on the refugees. Taken together, these stories explain to readers *why* the refugees from Ukraine are in Russia, *how* to deal with the influx, and *what* the future prospects are. Further, the stories indicate a *moral way* of acting towards the refugees. In the following, I present the narratives in greater detail and discuss their connection to the subject-position of "refugee from Ukraine".

Narratives about war

> You cannot control a war. It can be started, ignited, provoked. But you cannot manage it (…). In the east of Ukraine, in the centre of Europe – there is war. (…) And this is not merely war, but its most malignant form: civil war, always turning into a massacre for both sides who started it. (…) And this war is no longer governed by the presidents (even if they seem to have that impression) – the war controls them, driving each one of them – whether Russian, Ukrainian, American (…) – into a dead end of lost opportunities and mistakes committed (Racheva, *Novaya gazeta* 2014).

Refugees can be broadly defined as people who have left their homes because their basic needs were not being taken care of by their state of origin (Shacknove 1985). The refugees in this article have left Ukraine because of the conflict in South-East Ukraine. In many articles in my data-set this conflict is classified as a civil war. The extract above presents war as a chaotic, unmanageable force. War is the main actor whose goal is death and destruction.

Writing from South-East Ukraine, *Novaya gazeta* reporter Zinaida Burskaya points out that the phrase "it is war" has become "a universal explanation for practically everything" happening in that area. People use "the war" to explain bank raids, the lack of telephone SIM cards in shops, car thefts... "To be honest, in their place, I'd have done the same thing. It is war", commented a taxi driver in describing a car being stolen by insurgents at a petrol station (Burskaya, *Novaya gazeta* 2014).

As shown in Table 1, 16% of the articles in *Izvestiya*, 38% in *Novaya gazeta* and 28% in *Rossiiskaya gazeta* are narratives about war. Such narratives can be told in various ways: for example, experts may analyse a war from the perspective of their academic disciplines, whereas politicians may speak from their political stance. Here I focus on the stories from the conflict areas in South-East Ukraine told by special correspondents and by refugees. All such witness accounts in my data come from *Novaya gazeta* and *Rossiiskaya gazeta*; these two newspapers have published reports from Russian towns close to the Ukrainian border, from towns and villages in Donbass and Ukraine in general, and from refugee camps in Russia and camps for internally displaced people in South-East Ukraine.

Reporting in *Novaya gazeta* reflects the confusion among members of the public as to who the enemy is and what the "truth" is. Such confusion is in line with the image of the war in Ukraine as "chaotic". Take one story told by a refugee at a temporary accommodation camp: "In our building there is a woman, her children had travelled from West Ukraine: 'We came to save you' [they said]. From whom?, she asked. 'From the Russians' (…). 'Why would you do that?' she said, *they* are protecting us!'" (Artem'eva and Girin, *Novaya gazeta* 2014).

Special correspondents stationed in Donbass narrate most of the stories about the war. Voices of these special correspondents or reporters are present in all articles in the data-set, apart from opinion pieces and letters to the editor. In contrast, only 25 of 314 (8%) articles contain quotes from refugees themselves. When included, these quotes often function as witness accounts of the war in Donbass. In their own stories, the refugees are the *main protagonists.* They have a gender and age – women, men and children. They have voices, they are the narrators. These refugees explain why they had to leave Ukraine, for example:

> Our house was only 400 meters from the border outpost, so when the seizure of the outpost began, we were scared (recalls Aleksandr, head of the family). The children asked if we would leave soon. Constant shooting, fighter jets (*istrebiteli*) overhead – it all felt so oppressive (*gnetuschee chustvo*)… And we knew that troops were gathering around our city (…). It is impossible to get used to war. A fighter jet was the last straw. It fired missiles, and one flew very low over our house. I shouted to the children

to stick together. You feel so helpless because you cannot protect your children.

(Aleksandr, in Ignatova, *Rossiiskaya gazeta* 2014)

The plots in the narratives about war told by refugees include scenes from the refugee's past in Ukraine and thoughts about a future in Russia (refugee status, citizenship, work, education, a place to stay), or in Ukraine (if the bombings stop). These stories present the readers with the refugee perspective, with vivid descriptions of fear and the war as seen from the ground. In these narratives, the refugees position themselves as victims of the war, as in this story told by Zhenya, sixteen years old and internally displaced in Lugansk region:

We had been sitting on a bench [in our backyard]. After the first shot was fired we went inside. The next day we saw that the place [where we had been sitting] had been hit by a shell. I will long remember how it feels to realise that you could have been killed. (Zhenya, in Shenkman and Gromov, *Novaya gazeta* 2014)

Another example, from a woman from Lugansk at a temporary accommodation centre in Russia: "The people who were in the park ... Hands, legs, were all lying separately [from the bodies] ... It became more and more frightening. That was when we decided to leave" (Girin, *Novaya gazeta* 2014). What these protagonists want is to live in peace, to escape the fighting and death. "I don't know why they are fighting, but I do not want this, it is impossible to live like this" (Vitalik, age 10, internally displaced, Stanitsa Luganskaya, Lugansk region, in Shenkman and Gromov, *Novaya gazeta* 2014).

What about the antagonist in these stories? Recent research has focused on Russian narratives about Russia's fight against fascism in Ukraine (e.g. Edenborg 2017; Gaufman 2017: 103–123; Khaldarova and Pantti 2016). This narrative draws on images of the Great Patriotic War and constructs a disturbing image of Ukraine as overtaken by Fascists (or Nazis). From earlier studies, I had expected this narrative to dominate in my data as well, and that "Ukrainian Fascists" would be the antagonists in many stories. However, only 7% of the articles mention Nazis or Fascists; 12% mention the National Guard of Ukraine (*Natsgvardiya*); 13% mention "chasteners" (*karateli*) and 6% mention the Right Sector (*Pravyi Sektor*), a far-right Ukrainian

nationalist movement. My data reveal the ambiguity in the construction of a clearly defined enemy in newspaper stories about Donbass in the summer 2014.[8]

> After two hours of conversing with [Ukrainian right-wing radicals], I [the special correspondent] find myself thinking that I can no longer distinguish them from the DPR fighters [Donetsk insurgents]. (…) The former talk about "terrorists" and "Donbass cattle (*bydlo*)", the latter about "Fascists" and "chasteners" (*karateli*). Both are absolutely sure they are right, and are ready to kill and die for this half-truth. And the most revolting thing is that both are gradually forgetting that not everyone has to fight. That there are people who are simply peaceful. (Burskaya, *Novaya gazeta* 2014)

Rather than for instance "Ukrainian radicals" or "insurgents from Donbass," the antagonist in these stories seems to be war itself. Narratives told by refugees describe the presence of threat, they speak of sirens, weapons, bombings, bodies, and death. However, the actors behind the weapons are rarely named. It is "the war."

> We all hoped that the damned war would end. Almost all our neighbours had already left. (…) The young people left long ago, only the old people stayed. Some did not want to leave, others could not. Others again had problems with their papers. (…) We stayed until the last minute because of my dad [who is disabled]. We had to hide in the basement. We came out for groceries only once every few days. We live on the ninth floor, and have a view over the city. It is a terrible feeling when shells are flying outside your windows, and you can become their victim at any moment. (Female refuge from Donetsk region, interviewed in Rostov region (Russia) in Melikhova, *Rossiiskaya gazeta* 2014)

The message underlying these stories is that refugees from Ukraine have a legitimate reason for relocating to Russia: they are fleeing from death and destruction, from having to hide in basements – their ultimate desire is a life in peace. Such narratives explaining the presence of refugees from Ukraine in Russia are infused with pathos that may motivate Russian readers to help the refugees. Thus, narratives about war in Donbass published primarily in *Novaya gazeta* and *Rossiiskaya gazeta* in June–September 2014 crystallised and legitimised the subject-position of a refugee as a victim who needs and deserves help. I now turn to how this

subject-position is further cemented in narratives about refugee reception and aid.

Narratives about refugee reception and aid

The second thematic group consists of narratives about refugee reception and aid: this is the theme in 45% of the texts in the empirical material (see Table 1). Narratives about refugee reception and aid clearly dominated in stories that featured refugees from Ukraine and were published in *Izvestiya* (50%) and *Rossiiskaya gazeta* (49%) in the summer of 2014. In *Novaya gazeta* this was the second most recurrent theme (30%), after narratives about war (38%).

The Russian government has allocated substantial resources and passed several legislative and administrative measures to regularise the status and facilitate the integration of refugees from Ukraine (UNHCR 2018: 1). My data show how national newspapers in Russia provided their readers with an interpretive framework for making sense of the present, and looking to the future. The plot develops through several stages: the influx of refugees from Ukraine to Russia, the assistance they receive in Russia (accommodation, food, medical care) and their plans for the future (finding a job, getting Russian citizenship, or returning to Ukraine).

These narratives about refugee reception and aid reiterate statistics on the number of people who have been affected; for example: "88,500 refugees have crossed over to the territory of the Rostov region, 55,500 remain in the region, including 16,400 children" (Petrov, *Rossiiskaya gazeta* 2014a). These figures – several thousands of refugees – indicate the potential for humanitarian disaster, an overwhelming and chaotic situation that Russia would wish to avoid. As with the narratives about war, these narratives about refugee reception and aid are also about fighting against chaos, and restoring order. In the words of Lidiya Grafova, head of the Forum of Migrants' Organisations: "The statistics give an idea about the scale of the human tragedy" (Grafova, *Rossiiskaya gazeta* 2014). Further:

> I can remember all the refugees, from the very first waves, from Sumgayit.[9] But this is the first time such an enormous stream of refugees comes to our country. And this is the first stream to be received in this way by the state. There are a lot of volunteers, a lot of people who donate clothes, money, and even take refugees into their homes. The refugees have united our society and the authorities. (…) This tragedy (*beda*) demonstrates Russia's capacity in time of need, to receive a large stream of people,

without turning the situation into a humanitarian disaster. (Svetlana Gannushkina, head of the Civic Assistance Committee in Kostyuchenko, *Novaya gazeta* 2014)

The protagonist in such narratives is the *aid provider* and the antagonist is *chaos* – a disorderly situation that will arise if the aid provider cannot deal with the refugee influx. The refugees from Ukraine are positioned as the *recipients of aid:* they are the supporting characters in the stories; they are being helped, clothed, and fed. "The refugees are housed in more than 60 temporary accommodation centres, where they are provided with psychological and social support, including solutions to the employment question" (Vladimir Artamonov, Deputy Minister of Emergencies in Petrov, *Rosiiskaya gazeta* 2014b). Here the *aid provider* may be the Russian government, a region, an NGO, a volunteer or Russian society in general. Aid providers themselves are often the narrators of stories about refugee reception and aid. Because these aid providers are Russian, readers can readily identify with them. The underlying moral is that helping the refugees is the *right thing to do* in this situation. "Even strangers started to offer their help when they found out about a family from Lugansk with many children. Residents of Volgograd are bringing what they can: a pram for the baby, food, toys for the children, clothes" (Ignatova, *Rosiiskaya gazeta* 2014).

However, some narratives also point out that receiving refugees emplaces strains on Russian society. In addition to chaos, it appears that resource scarcity, and the underdeveloped refugee reception system in Russia, function as antagonistic forces that can obstruct aid providers in their work of helping the refugees. For example:

> If we simply compare two figurers: 26,000 [refugees] are living in temporary accommodation centres, and 515,000 [refugees] have entered the country (they have to live somewhere), it becomes obvious that Russian society as a whole has borne the brunt of the refugee influx (…)We can rejoice wholeheartedly at the responsiveness shown by Russians, but we should bear in mind that hospitality has its limits. I personally know quite a few cases where families gladly received close relatives from Ukraine, but after a while, relationships in these families became intolerable. What can one do? Most Russians live very modestly, they can simply not afford to feed a second family for a long time. (Grafova, *Rossiiskaya gazeta* 2014)

Like Grafova, many other narrators point out that most refugees stay with relatives in Russia. One reason is that the state does not have enough refugee accommodation centres or other kinds of resources to handle thousands of newcomers: they have to rely on the public. Russians have indeed been eager to help the refugees – but, for many people, concerns about their own well-being and access to public goods become more important: "Nevertheless, one is more worried about oneself and about one's income. On the subject of helping refugees, people are more worried that, for example, a Ukrainian may get a kindergarten place, but not their own child (Human Rights Council Deputy Chairman Yevgeny Bobrov in Samokhvalova, *Izvestiya* 2014a). On the one hand, the stories describe a willingness to accept refugees from Ukraine in Russia; on the other hand "when it comes to real policy, to allocating funds, the opinion of the population changes considerably, to negative attitudes towards migrants and unwillingness to share" (Natalia Zorkaya, sociologist from Levada Center, in Samokhvalova, *Izvestiya* 2014a).

The message still tends to be that the state, the regions and society need to work together towards a common goal and help the refugees from Ukraine because they are *special*. There is a connection between people from Russia and people from Ukraine. "Yes, these are special refugees, and we should not forget that these people are dear to us, and are close to us (*Eto rodnye i blizkie nam lyudi)* (Grafova, *Rossiiskaya gazeta* 2014). Ideas about the special relationship between Russia and Ukraine are part of Russian cultural imagery; they build on imperial nationalist representations of a common past as part of the Kievan Rus' and the Soviet Union (Plokhy 2014). Newspapers often use family metaphors: Ukrainians are brothers, Ukraine is a fraternal country, the war in Ukraine is a fratricidal war (Moen-Larsen 2019).

To sum up, in narratives about refugee reception and aid, the protagonist is an aid provider, whose goal is to help the refugees from Ukraine. The opponent here is found in the potential for chaos posed by the refugee influx, the lack of resources and an underdeveloped refugee reception system. The moral is that helping refugees is the right thing to do, not least because they are special people for Russians. The aid providers – the heroes – are overcoming chaos by helping refugees, who are positioned as "passive" recipients of aid.

Narratives about international relations

The third recurring theme is international relations in the context of the conflict in Ukraine. Of the three thematic groups of narratives discussed here, this is the least dominant theme in the data from *Novaya gazeta* and *Rossiiskaya gazeta* (both 11%) but is more evident in *Izvestiya* (28%) (see Table 1). Refugees feature as background characters in grand narratives about geopolitical interest and global power games. In these stories "refugees" function metonymically to signify war or armed conflict. The protagonist is Russia; the antagonists are the West and (or) Ukraine; other characters may include intergovernmental organizations like NATO and UN. The narrators of these stories are official voices, like those of Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin, representatives of the government of Russia, politicians, experts and pundits.

Narratives about international relations assign blame for the conflict to the West, the USA in particular, whereas Russia is positioned as a peace builder and the hero. "We will do everything in order for the conflict to be stopped as soon as possible, for the bloodshed in Ukraine to end" (Putin, in Sozaev-Gur'ev, *Izvestiya* 2014). This plot covers the negative developments in Ukraine, their origins, and stresses that Russia is working to find a solution. For example, Sergei Ivanov, Head of Staff of the Presidential Administration, describes the chain of events in the following way:

> I would like to remind you how [the conflict in Ukraine] began. It started when Mr Yanukovych proposed to postpone the signing of an association agreement between Ukraine and the European Union. I emphasise: he did not refuse to sign, but recommended not rushing. Because at the last moment – better late than never, as they say – he realised that the signing of this agreement would cause serious damage to the economy of the country. As a result, Maidan started, and was supported by Western countries. The consequence of this: the events in South-East Ukraine, which developed into a war, essentially a civil, punitive war, as a result of which thousands of people have died. In the same chain of events – the murder of their own people on the Maidan, the Crimea, the crimes in Odessa, the shooting down of the Boeing [MH17, on 17 July 2014], the shelling of Ukrainian cities, which has lasted until recently, a humanitarian catastrophe. (Ivanov in Grigor'eva, *Rossiiskaya gazeta* 2014)

In contrast with narratives about war, where there is a certain ambiguity connected to the construction of an antagonist, narratives about international relations present a much clearer symbolic opposition between Good and Evil. The West has been supporting the spiral of events that has led Ukraine to civil war: ergo, the West is supporting the Ukrainian aggression in Donbass that has led to civilian casualties and the stream of refugees.

> According to some reports, the number of victims of the civil war [in Ukraine] has already exceeded several thousand. Hundreds of thousands of refugees have moved to Russia, far away from the war. (…) For some reason, Washington, which is actively helping Ukraine, is not to blame. Obama claims that Moscow is to blame. (Vorob'ev, *Rossiiskaya gazeta* 2014)

This narrative builds on the familiar enemy-image of the USA. It fits well with the findings from other research that blame American (or Western) "hypocrisy" for global instability, and advocate a "multipolar" world where Russia can take its rightful place as a balancing power (Szostek 2017a, 382; 2017b).

> Before our very eyes, with one hundred per cent permission and with the unconditional support of the USA, the EU, NATO and others, the G7 have burned people alive, killed children, left the elderly without a roof over their heads, and shot columns of refugees. (Kholmogorov, *Izvestiya* 2014b)

Here G7 – Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the USA – stand metonymically for the West. In Kholmogorov's account, "the G7" is a metaphor for the international support given to Ukraine: by supporting the Ukrainian authorities, the West also supports the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) in Donbass and therefore also, *inter alia,* the murder of children. This representation of "the West" as the real perpetrator behind the events in Ukraine has been noted by other researchers as well (e.g. Gaufman 2017, Szostek 2017b).

Thus, there emerge three main ways of representing Ukraine in narratives about international relations. The first is as victim of the conflict: "[Ukraine] has fallen into a bloody chaos, a fratricidal conflict. Thousands have died, hundreds of thousands have become refugees" (Putin, in Sozaev-Gur'ev, *Izvestiya* 2014). The second way of representing Ukraine is as a pawn in a power game played by "our European neighbours and transatlantic partners"

(Naryshkin, *Rossiiskaya gazeta* 2014). The third way is through enemy images, with connections to Fascism, Nazism and right-wing extremism. These are classical enemy-images that are part of the Russian cultural imagery.[10] In some narratives, Ukraine is connected to right-wing groups through references to Stephan Bandera, a Ukrainian nationalist leader who was active in the period around the Second World War and who has been criticised for collaborating with the Nazi movement. "The fact is that we have another image of the enemy – it is Bandera, the Nazis, who are scarier than the evil Americans. [Russians] believe that the Americans are behind them [these forces], but unfortunately, the Ukrainians commit the atrocities themselves" (Valery Fedorov, Director of VTsIOM, in Samokhvalova, *Izvestiya* 2014b).

As mentioned, of the three thematic groups of narratives studied here, the international relations narrative gives the readers the clearest images of the opposition between good and evil. Russia is clearly on the side of the good; the West represents evil. Ukraine is positioned somewhere in-between: a victim of Western manipulation, a pawn in the hands of the West and as infiltrated by right-wing radicals and Nazis. The goal for Russia is to save the day, bring peace to Ukraine and receive Ukrainian refugees. "Women and children are dying. There are already tens of thousands of refugees, they are running to Russia" (Limonov, *Izvestiya* 2014). The moral is that Russia is acting in a proper way on the international arena. Narratives that draw on culturally powerful images such as "ethnic cleansing" are potentially powerful tools that can compel to action. "Once the stories that are told shift into an apocalyptic mode in which the contest is between good and radical evil, with antagonists made unredeemable, war is all but unavoidable" (Polletta et al. 2011: 119–120).

Let us return to the core theme of this study. How are refugees represented and positioned in Russian newspaper articles? What is their role in the narrative? In the narratives about international relations refugees, for example, are mentioned as the subject of negotiations in peace processes: "Only agreements on separate issues are possible: refugees, prisoners, the restriction of use of some types of military equipment" (Pavlovsky, *Novaya gazeta* 2014). Refugees are an outcome of Russia's (lack of action) in Donbass: "We will have to receive millions of refugees who are furious with Russia for refusing to help [in Donbass]" (Kholmogorov, *Izvestiya* 2014a). References to refugees are included in the representation of other states as antagonists: "Ukraine needs refugees from the East, either as hostages or as extras in propaganda performances" (Karaulov, *Izvestiya* 2014). In fact, refugees are

mentioned in almost every quote included in this section – but they remain almost invisible. The narratives about international relations published in *Izvestiya*, *Novaya gazeta* and *Rossiiskaya gazeta* in June–September 2014 did not feature "the refugee" as a subject-position that an individual can occupy – rather, the term "refugee" was included as a signifier of violent conflict, a faceless and voiceless victim.

Conclusion

This article has sought to nuance the literature on Russian media representations of the conflict in Ukraine. In contrast to studies focusing on strategic narratives employed by Russian authorities in the context of security issues, this contribution has explored another kind of story – stories about refugees from Ukraine. I have discussed the themes of the narratives, their plots and characters, and their narrators. I have discussed the subject-position "refugee" and the attitudes towards refugees cultivated in *Izvestiya, Novaya gazeta* and *Rossiiskaya gazeta* in June–September 2014. In the summer of 2014, Russian newspapers offered space to a range of narratives and voices. Table 2 sums up the main findings.

Table 2. Narrative analysis: main findings

	War	Refugee reception and aid	International relations
Protagonist	Refugee	Aid provider	Russia
Antagonist	War	Underdeveloped refugee reception system Chaos	The West Ukraine
Narrator	Refugee Special correspondent	Aid provider Special correspondent Reporter	Putin and Kremlin Government official Expert/Pundit
Subject-position refugee	Main character Victim of war	Supporting character Recipient of aid and help	Background characters A signifier of conflict Faceless and voiceless victim

I have identified three main thematic groups of narratives – narratives about war, narratives about refugee reception and aid, and narratives about international relations. The dominant theme in the data, highlighted in 45% of the articles, is refugee reception and aid: all three newspapers offer relatively coherent stories about the large numbers of refugees from Ukraine

coming to Russia. The other two thematic groups of narratives are unequally distributed in the data: *Novaya gazeta* has the highest percentage of stories about war, while *Izvestiya* has the highest percentage of stories about international relations. That in turn indicates that those who read only one of these three newspapers get different angles on the reasons for the refugee influx. Reporting on the war-ridden Donetsk and Lugansk regions paints a picture quite different from the opinion pieces about the Western origins of the conflict in Ukraine.

Taken together, the narratives in my data articulate a subject-position of "refugee from Ukraine" as a victim and as a recipient of aid. The detailed accounts of war, chaos and death function as arguments for receiving the refugees and allocating funds for them. Stories about refugee reception serve to position Russians as aid providers, and refugees as deserving recipients of aid – while also signalling that helping refugees is, under the circumstances, the morally right thing to do. Finally, narratives about international relations assign the blame for the conflict in Ukraine to "Others". In the process of making sense of this new situation – the presence of large number of refugees from Ukraine – the narrators rearticulate familiar images: actors from the West are the reason why people had to leave their homes in Donbass. The "evil United States" has manipulated Ukraine – Russia is "superior, moral and good".

This article is also intended as a contribution to the studies of refugees in general. By combining analysis of narratives with analysis of subject-positions, it has offered an innovative prism through which to study national and international debates about refugees and refugee reception. Structured national narratives explain and legitimise (or problematise) the presence of refugees in a country. These stories explain why refugees have arrived (for instance, because of a war), and indicate the way forward – whether they should be allowed to stay or must return to their countries of origin.

The concept of subject-position offers a valuable tool for understanding the mechanism through which national narratives legitimise certain ideas about refugees and the implications they have for policy. In the narratives explored in this article, "refugee" was repeatedly positioned as a victim who deserved help – whether as the main protagonist of the story, as a supporting character or as a signifier of conflict. Further, receiving refugees from Ukraine was presented as the morally right thing for Russia and its people to do. If, however, the national narratives had positioned the refugees as the *antagonists*, for example by presenting them as security threats, or as economic migrants posing as refugees, then the morally right thing to do

would be to refuse to receive them. The structure of the narrative would remain the same, but the implications for refugee policy would be completely different. While the familiar structure of narratives can stand the test of time because we lean on recognizable patterns and ideas in trying to interpret the world, the inherent fluidity of subject-position offers a way to develop a deeper understanding of societal innovation and change.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] I have chosen to use Russian form, "Donbass", instead of Ukrainian "Donbas", and "Lugansk" instead of "Luhansk", because my empirical material is in Russian.

[2] Over the years, Russia and Ukraine have had entangled histories and a complicated relationship. Space limits do not allow for a detailed discussion of this relationship here, and there is already an ample literature on this topic: e.g. Plokhy 2017, 2014; Sakwa 2015; Wilson 2015; Reid 2000.

[3] I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who pointed this out.

[4] In the newspapers I have analysed, refugees from Ukraine were also referred to as refugees from South-East Ukraine, Russians (*russkie)* from Ukraine, Ukrainian refugees, compatriots and [forced] migrants (*pereselentsy*). I have chosen to call them "refugees from Ukraine" or "refugees". However, it should be noted that the majority of these people are Russian-speakers from Donbass.

[5] The beginning and the end of the story are particularly important parts of the plot, because they influence the meaning of the whole story (Johannessen et al. 2018: 103).

[6] All quotes are translated from Russian by the author.

[7] When I include quotes from the empirical material, I specify the voice behind the quote and the journalist who has written the article. In cases where I mention only the name of the

journalist, the journalist is also the narrator. All data referenced in the text are listed in Appendix 1.

[8] Had I based my data selection on a timeframe that included Euromaidan and other search words than "refugee", I would probably have captured more stories about Ukrainian fascists. However, that was not the purpose of this article.

[9] This is a reference to a pogrom against the Armenian population of Sumgayit in Azerbaijan in late February 1988, the first violent inter-ethnic conflict in the final years of the USSR.

[10] See Gaufman (2017, 103–123) for a discussion of Russian representations and perceptions of fascism in the context of the Ukraine crisis.

Literature

Abashin, S. 2017. "Migration policies in Russia. Laws and Debates." In *Migrant Workers in Russia. Global Challenges of the Shadow Economy in Societal Transformation*, edited by A. Heusala and K. Aitamurto, 16–34. London: Routledge.

A'Beckett, L. 2019. "Displaced Ukrainians: Russo-Ukrainian Discussions of Victims from the Conflict Zone in Eastern Ukraine." In *Migration and Media: Discourses about Identities in Crisis,* edited by L. Viola and A. Musolff, 265–290. Amsterdam: John Benjamins .

Antip'ev K. 2015. "Ukrainskie bezhentsy v Rossii: problemy pervichnoi adaptatsii (po materialam sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniya)." *Migratsionnoe pravo* (2): 12–16.

Baysha, O. 2018. "Synecdoche that Kills: How Barack Obama and Vladimir PutinConstructed Different Ukraines for Different Ends." *The International Communication Gazette* 80 (3): 230–249.

Bonch-Osmolovskaya, T. 2015. "Combating the Russian State Propaganda Machine: Strategies of Information Resistance." *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 1 (1): 175–218.

Burr, V. 2003. *Social Constructionism,* 2nd edition. London: Routledge.

Chervinskaya A. 2014. "Konstitutsionno-pravovye osobennosti statusa pereselentsev v svete politicheskoi situatsii na Ukraine." *Politika i pravo* 4 (34): 72–78.

Davies, B. and R. Harré. 2007. "Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves." In *Discourse Theory and Practice,* edited by M. Wetherell, S. Taylor and S.J. Yates, 261–283. London: Sage.

Edenborg, E. 2017. "Creativity, Geopolitics and Ontological Security: Satire on Russia and the War in Ukraine." *Postcolonial Studies* 20 (3): 294–316.

Foreign Policy Concept. 2013. "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation." 18 February. URL: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/122186. (accessed 28 January 2019).

Gaufman, E. 2017. *Security Threats and Public Perception: Digital Russia and the Ukraine Crisis*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gerber, T.P. and J. Zavisca. 2016. Does Russian Propaganda Work? *The Washington Quarterly* 2 (39): 79–98.

Greimas, A.J. 1987. "Actants, Actors, and Figures." In *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory,* edited by A.J. Greimas, 106–120. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Gulina, O. and A. Poznyak. 2018. "Mezhdu Evropoi i Rossiei: geografiya migratsionnykh potokov iz Ukrainy posle 2014 g." *Journal of Social Policy Studies* 16 (4): 561–576. DOI: https://doi.org/10.17323/727-0634-2018-16-4-561-576.

Hansen, F.S. 2015. "Framing Yourself into a Corner: Russia, Crimea and the Minimal Action Space." *European Security* 24 (1): 141–158.

Hutchings, S. and J. Szostek. 2015. "Dominant Narratives in Russian Political and Media Discourse during the Ukraine Crisis." In *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives,* edited by A. Pikulicka-Wilczewska and R. Sakwa, 183–196. Bristol: E-International Relations Publishing.

Isachenko, D. 2012. *The Making of Informal States: Statebuilding in Northern Cyprus and Transdniestria*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Izvestiya. 2019. "Tirazh", No 185, 1 October: 8.

Johannessen, L.E.F., T.W. Rafoss and E.B. Rasmussen. 2018. *Hvordan bruke teori*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Kazun, A. 2016. "Framing Sanctions in the Russian Media: The Rally Effect and Putin's Enduring Popularity." *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 24 (3): 327–350.

Khaldarova, I. and M. Pantti. 2016. "Fake News: The Narrative Battle over the Ukrainian Conflict." *Journalism Practice* 10 (7): 891–901.

Kuznetsova, I. 2018. "Bezhentsy iz Ukrainy: migratsionnaya politika i povsednevnost'." *Journal of Social Policy Studies* 16 (4): 577–594. DOI: https://doi.org/10.17323/727-0634-2018-16-4-577-594.

Laclau, E. and C. Mouffe. 2014. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics.* London: Verso.

Lassila, J. 2017. "Beyond Conjunctures of Russia's National Future. Migrants and Refugees in Russia's Political Discourse in 2013 and 2014." In *Migrant Workers in Russia: Global Challenges of the Shadow Economy in Societal Transformation,* edited by A. Heusala and K. Aitamurto, 51–69. London: Routledge.

Levada-Center. 2016. "Doverie smi i gotovnost' vyskazyvat' svoe mnenie, 12 August". https://www.levada.ru/2016/08/12/14111/ (accessed 8 August 2019).

Lynch, G. and R. Sheldon. 2013. "The Sociology of the Sacred: A Conversation with Jeffrey Alexander." *Culture and Religion* 14 (3): 253–267.

Moen-Larsen, N. 2019. "Brothers and Barbarians: Discursive Constructions of 'Refugees' in Russian Media." *Acta Sociologica*. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699318817597.

Mediologiya. 2018. Top-10 samykh tsitiruemykh gazet v SMI – sentyabr' 2018. http://www.mlg.ru/ratings/media/federal/6311/#gazeti (accessed 25.09.2019).

Myhre, M.H. 2018. *Compatriots into Citizens: Policies and Perceptions of Citizenship Acquisition in Post-Soviet Russia*. PhD Dissertation in Russia/Slavic Studies. Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages. Oslo: University of Oslo.

Neumann, I.B. 2017. *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study of Identity and International Relations.* 2nd edn. London: Routledge.

Novaya gazeta. 2019. "Tirazh", No 110, 2 October: 25.

OHCHR. 2019. *Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine 16 November 2018 to 15 February 2019.* https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ReportUkraine16Nov2018-15Feb2019.pdf (accessed 13 March 2019).

Ostevik, M. 2017. "Å kommunisere en konflikt aktører i RTs dekning av situasjonen i Ukraina i februar–mars 2014." *Nordisk Østforum* 31: 1–21. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.23865/nof.v31.579.

Plokhy, S. 2014. *Lost Kingdom: The Quest for Empire and the Making of the Russian Nation.* New York: Basic Books.

Plokhy, S. 2017. *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine.* New York: Basic Books.

Podlesnaya M. and Yu. Khomutova. 2016. "Bezhentsy s yugo-vostoka Ukrainy: opyt sotsial'noi adaptatsii." *Teoriya i praktika obshchestvennogo razvitiya* (8): 29–36.

Polletta, F., P.C.B. Chen, B.G. Gardner and A. Motes. 2011. "The Sociology of Storytelling." *Annual Review of Sociology* 37: 109–130.

Racheva, E. 2014. "Pogranichnoe sostoyanie." *Novaya Gazeta,* 11 August.

Rafoss, T. 2015. "Kampen om demokratiet. 22. juli og konstruksjonen av et kulturelt traume." In *Kultursosiologisk forskning*, edited by H. Larsen, 197–212. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Reid, A. 2000. *Borderland: A Journey Through the History of Ukraine.* Boulder: Westview.

Rossiiskaya gazeta. 2019. "Tirazh", No 219, 1 October: 6.

Sakwa, R. 2015. *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands.* London: I.B.Tauris.

Shacknove, A. 1985. "Who is a Refugee?" *Ethics* 95: 274–84.

Stegnii, V. and K. Antip'ev. 2015. "Problemy adaptatsii bezhentsev iz Ukrainy v Rossii." *Vlast'* (6): 138–145.

Stegnii, V. and K. Antip'ev. 2016. "Volontery o problemakh adaptatsii bezhentsev iz Ukrainy v Rossii." *Grazhdanskoe obshchestvo v Rossii i za rubezhom* (3): 18–22.

Szostek, J. 2017a. "The Power and Limits of Russia's Strategic Narrative in Ukraine: The Role of Linkage." *Perspectives on Politics* 15 (2): 379–395.

Szostek, J. 2017b. "Defence and Promotion of Desired State Identity in Russia's Strategic Narrative." *Geopolitics* 22 (3): 571–593.

Tanum, S. and A. Krogstad. 2014. "Fortellinger om livet uten arbeid." *Sosiologisk tidsskrift* 22 (3): 249–275.

Thwaites, T., L. Davis and W. Mules. 2002. *Introducing Cultural and Media Studies: A Semiotic Approach.* Basingstoke: Palgrave.

UNHCR. 2014. *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2014.* http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/country/556725e69/unhcr-global-trends-2014.html (accessed 30 January 2019).

UNHCR. 2018. *UNHCR Submission on Russian Federation: 30th UPR session.* http://www.refworld.org/country,,UNHCR,,RUS,,5b082dbf4,0.html (accessed 23 October 2018).

UNHCR. 2019a. *Ukraine*. http://reporting.unhcr.org/Ukraine (accessed 13 March 2019).

UNHCR. 2019b. *Russian Federation*. http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2551 (accessed 13 March 2019).

Walker, S. and H. Salem. 2014. "Religious Banners, Russian Propaganda and Ragtag Militias Herald Crimea Vote." *The Guardian*. 15 March. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/15/crimea-ukraine-russia-vote-banners-propaganda-militia (accessed 29 January 2019).

Wilson, A. 2015. *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation,* 4th edn. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Appendix 1 Data referenced in the text

Artem'eva, A. and N. Girin. 2014. "Revu vezde..." *Novaya gazeta,* 22 August.

Borisov, T. 2014. "Chemodan - obstrel – Rossiya." *Rossiiskaya gazeta,* 7 July.

Burskaya, Z. 2014. "Eto Voina." *Novaya gazeta,* 6 August.

Girin, N. 2014. "Domoi? Esli na nedele budet spokoino..." *Novaya gazeta,* 10 September.

Grafova, L. 2014. "Obshchee gore." *Rossiiskaya gazeta,* 1 August.

Grigor'eva, E. 2014. "Mir bez sten." *Rossiiskaya gazeta,* 22 September.

Ignatova, N. 2014. "Mama, uedem! Tut strelyayut." *Rossiiskaya gazeta,* 4 July.

Karaulov, I. 2015. "Novaya 'doroga zhizni'." *Izvestiya,* 6 June.

Kholmogorov, E. 2014a. "Khudoi mir vmeste s dobroi ssoroi." *Izvestiya,* 19 June.

Kholmogorov, E. 2014b. "Serdtse t'my." *Izvestiya,* 29 September.

Kostyuchenko, E. 2014. "Punkt naznacheniya." *Novaya gazeta,* 20 June.

Limonov, E. 2014. "Samoprovozglashennye." *Izvestiya,* 16 June.

Melikhova, E. 2014. "Deti i zhenshchiny ishchut spaseniya." *Rossiiskaya gazeta,* 18 September.

Naryshkin, S. 2014. "Evropa ishchet priklyuchenii." *Rossiiskaya gazeta,* 10 July.

Novoselova, E. and E. Yakovleva. 2014. "S Amura s lyubov'yu." *Rossiiskaya gazeta,* 2 September.

Pavlovsky, G. 2014. "Krizis ne perevalil cherez pik." *Novaya gazeta,* 29 August.

Petrov, V. 2014a. "Spasti ot zimy." *Rossiiskaya gazeta,* 21 August.

Petrov, V. 2014b. "Konvoi zhdet." *Rossiiskaya gazeta,* 5 September.

Racheva, E. 2014. "Pogranichnoe sostoyanie." *Novaya gazeta,* 11 August.

Samokhvalova, M. 2014a. "Bezhentsy dolzhny poluchat' priyut srazu, a grazhdanstvo – posle proverki." *Izvestiya,* 6 August.

Samokhvalova, M. 2014b. "Bol'shinstvo rossiyan schitayut sobytiya na Ukraine grazhdanskoi voinoi." *Izvestiya,* 26 August.

Shenkman, J. and M. Gromov. 2014. "Pod vystrely mozhno spat'." *Novaya gazeta,* 24 September.

 Sozaev-Gur'ev, E. 2014. "Integratsiya Kryma i Sevastopolya budet prodolzhena." *Izvestiya,* 15 August.

Vorob'ev, V. 2014. "V Bagdade vse nespokoino." *Rossiiskaya gazeta,*18 June.