Image: Getty/Jakub Laichter

Media and Identity
in Wartime Donbas, 2014-2017

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Media and Identity in Wartime Donbas, 2014-2017

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Preface

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

Abstract

Title: Media and Identity in Wartime Donbas, 2014-2017
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This dissertation examines the discourses of local print and internet media in the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk "People's Republics" (DNR and LNR) in eastern Ukraine, paying particular attention to the role of these discourses in the construction of group identity. Drawing on nationalism studies, identity studies and social psychology, I trace how authorities and media actors in these two unrecognised territories sought to build legal legitimacy and public support, and to shape collective identity between 2014 and 2017. To do so, I analyse both primary and secondary source material, including speeches, statements and writings by local officials, legislative documents, internal communications, and a large corpus of news articles published in local newspapers and internet media.

After tracing the development of the DNR and LNR's political and media landscapes, as well as the legislation passed by the authorities to regulate the mass media, I use Natural Language Processing methods to examine what narratives predominated in DNR and LNR newspaper and internet media coverage, with an abiding focus on attempts to shape and develop group identity. I demonstrate that DNR and LNR authorities prioritised building and projecting internal and external legitimacy from the beginning by controlling the information space through media capture and by passing restrictive legislation. Despite the fact that this legislation created conditions for the pursuit of an ideological identity project, I argue that this project remained unrealised and incoherent, founded more on representations of the 'they' of the outgroup rather than the 'we' of the ingroup. Understanding the semiotic impoverishment of this project can offer insight into the nature and future of Europe's "forgotten war".

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And to my father Peter, my mother Klarie, my brother Thom, and Peter and Yka: I love you all dearly.

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List of abbreviations

ATO – Anti-Terrorist Operation

DNR – Donetsk People's Republic (Donetskaia Narodnaia Respublika)

LNR – Luhansk People's Republic (Luganskaia Narodnaia Respublika)

NMF – Non-negative Matrix Factorisation

ORDLO – Separate Raions of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (okremi raiony Donets'koï ta Luhans'koï oblastei)

OSCE – Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

SBU – Security Service of Ukraine (Sluzhba Bezpeky Ukraïny)

Tf-Idf – Term frequency-Inverse document frequency
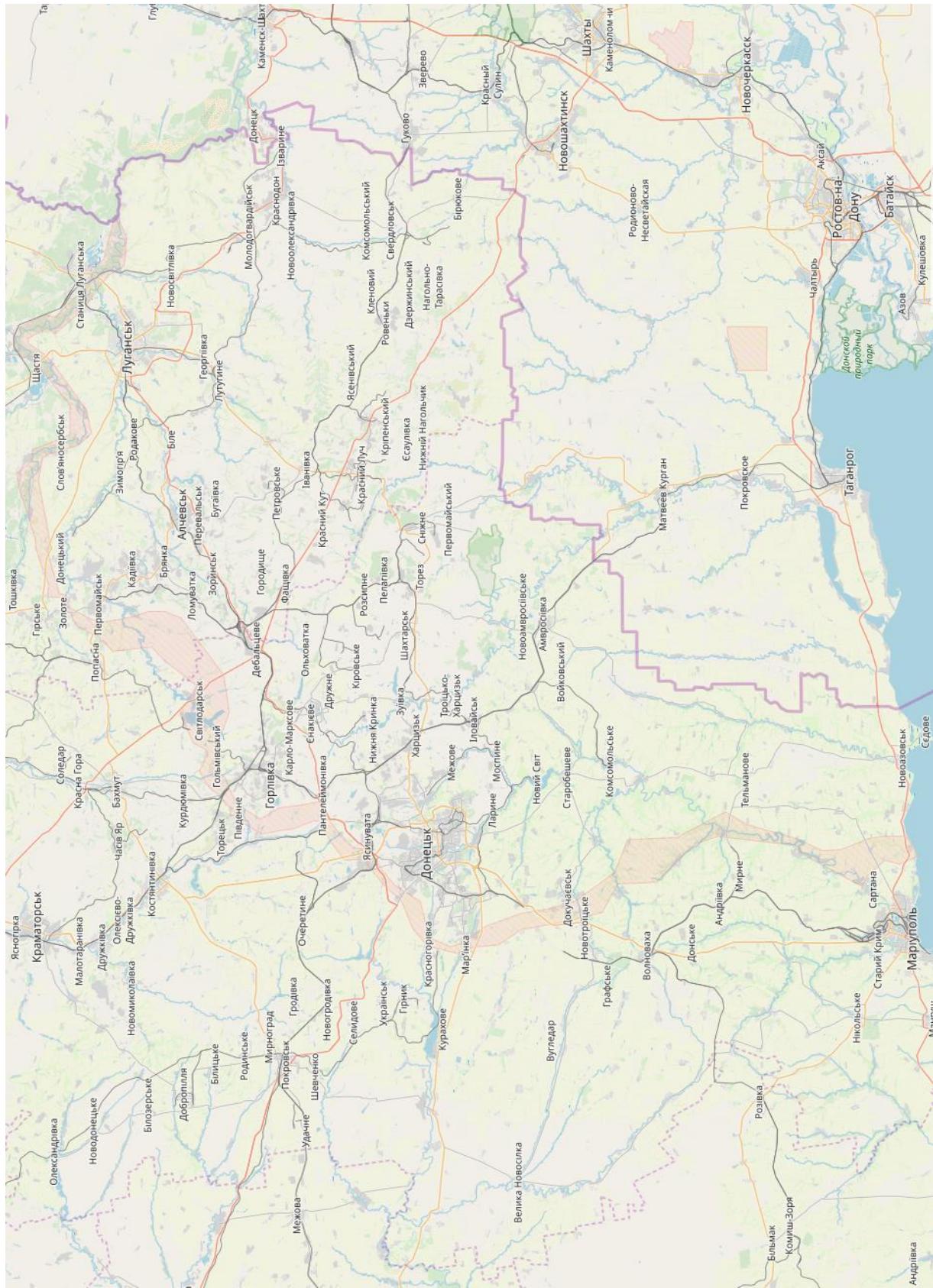
VSU – Armed Forces of Ukraine (vooruzhennye sily Ukrainy [ru.])

ZSU – Armed Forces of Ukraine (zbroini syly Ukraïny [ukr.])

Note on transliteration

This dissertation uses sources that were originally written in Ukrainian and Russian. To display relevant terms in Latin script, I will use a simplified version of the US Library of Congress transliteration system for modern Russian and Ukrainian (without ligatures for purposes of readability). Places in eastern Ukraine often have both a Russian and a Ukrainian name. In this dissertation, I will use the Russian transliteration when referring to places, proper names or organisations in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, as Russian is the dominant spoken language in ORDLO territories, and the Russian version of names are the most commonly used (e.g. the newspaper *Makeevskii Rabochii*). For places located outside of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (e.g. Kyiv and not Kiev, Kharkiv and not Kharkov) I will use the Ukrainian transliteration, as well as for Ukrainian proper names (e.g. Petro Poroshenko). The only exceptions are the name of the city of Luhansk, which will be written as "Luhansk" and not "Lugansk", and Donbas, which will be written as such and not "Donbass".

Map of the conflict zone

The demarcation line between the territory that is under the control of the Ukrainian government and territory under DNR/LNR control (ORDLO) is marked in red. Courtesy of OpenStreetMap (www.openstreetmap.com).

0 Introduction

0.1 The Donetsk and Luhansk "People's Republics"

On February 21 2014, months of pro-European demonstrations on Kyiv's Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) resulted in the flight of Ukraine's then-president Viktor Ianukovych from office. This event, locally referred to as the "revolution of dignity" but known in the West as the Euromaidan Revolution, led to fundamental changes in Ukraine's political, societal and geographical make-up[1]. Soon after Ianukovych's cabinet was deposed by parliament and a new, pro-Western government was sworn in, groups of masked men in unmarked uniforms began to appear in strategic locations throughout Crimea, a peninsula in the country's south. These armed men captured local administration buildings and army bases, and quickly took control of the Russian Federation's Black Sea Fleet. They also took over the Crimean parliament building and installed a new, pro-Russian local government. After a disputed referendum was held on March 16, the new Crimean parliament issued a declaration of independence from Ukraine. Russia formally annexed Crimea two days later, in contravention of international law. Crimea became de facto if not de jure Russian territory, despite widespread international condemnation and unresolved legal disputes[2].

Around the same time, pro-Russian and anti-Euromaidan demonstrations began to pop up throughout Ukraine's southern and eastern oblasts. The catchment area of the Don river, which flows through southwest Russia and eastern Ukraine, became a particular hotbed of protest. In many places throughout this Don Basin – called Donbas – these demonstrations escalated into violent clashes between (local and non-local) protesters, law enforcement and pro-Ukrainian activist groups. In Donetsk, the capital of Donetsk oblast, pro-Russian activists occupied the city's Regional State Administration building between March 1 and March 6, until they were removed by the Ukrainian Security Services (SBU). One month later, on April 6, one to two thousand people gathered in front of the same building once again, this time demanding a status referendum similar to the one held in Crimea and threatening to capture the regional

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[1] Joanna Szostek, "The Power and Limits of Russia's Strategic Narrative in Ukraine: The Role of Linkage," *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 2 (2017): 379–395, https://doi.org/10.1017/S153759271700007X.
[2] Thomas D Grant, "Annexation of Crimea," *The American Journal of International Law* 109, no. 1 (2015): 68–95, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5305/amerjintelaw.109.1.0068.

government by "people's mandate"[3]. When their demands were not met, the protesters again occupied the building. Inside, a meeting was held in which the attendants voted to declare independence from Ukraine, and proclaimed the "Donetsk People's Republic" (Donetskaia Narodnaia Respublika; DNR). In the weeks that followed, armed groups took over various administration buildings and infrastructure in other towns and cities in the Donetsk oblast. Meanwhile, the acting Ukrainian president Oleksandr Turchynov launched a large-scale "anti-terrorist" operation against the DNR. Russia sent equipment and military personnel across the border to support the insurgency[4].
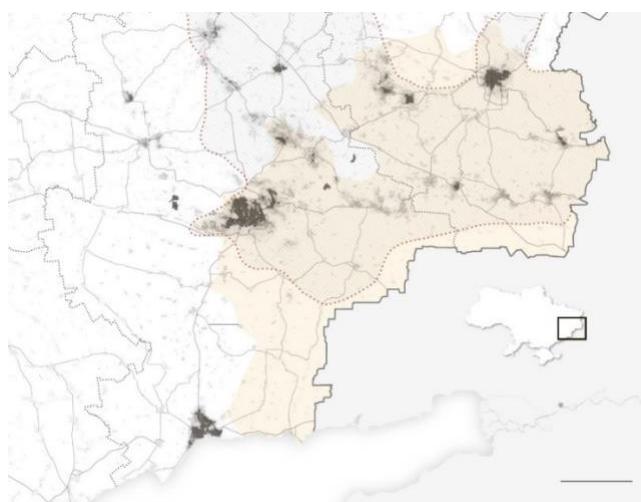
Figure 1: Map of eastern Ukraine, mid-2015. Darker areas show higher population density.

Also on April 6, pro-Russian protesters in Luhansk, the capital of Luhansk oblast (which borders Donetsk as well as Russia), seized the office of the local SBU. Security forces were quickly able to recapture the building, but around two thousand protesters gathered outside for a "people's assembly" to demand federalisation or outright independence. Clashes continued, and on April 27, the protesters, now in control of various regional administration offices, proclaimed the "Luhansk People's Republic" (Luganskaia Narodnaia Respublika; LNR), and announced that they would fight alongside the DNR[5].

An extended, violent confrontation with the Ukrainian army erupted. For much of 2014 and part of 2015, swaths of territory in the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts changed hands multiple times between the forces of the Ukrainian Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) and the insurgents, who shared the same enemy but not the same goals.

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[3] BBC News, "Ukraine Crisis: Protesters declare 'Donetsk People's Republic,'" *Www.bbc.co.uk*, April 7, 2014, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26919928.
[4] Bellingcat, "Russian Officers and Militants Identified as Perpetrators of the January 2015 Mariupol Artillery Strike," 2018, https://www.bellingcat.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Russian-Officers-and-Militants-Identified-as-Perpetrators-of-the-January-2015-Mariupol-Artillery-Strike.pdf. See also this website, which maps the geolocation of Russian personnel and weaponry in Donbas: https://ilovaisk.forensic-architecture.org/
[5] RFE/RL, "Separatists Declare 'People's Republic' in Ukraine's Luhansk," www.rferl.org, 2014, https://www.rferl.org/a/separatists-declare-luhansk-peoples-republic/25364894.html.

Conflicts between rivalling militias within the DNR and LNR would erupt with regularity, and power in the region was divided between various armed groups[6]. Figure 1, courtesy of the *New York Times*, shows eastern Ukraine in mid-2015[7]. The darker-coloured areas were under DNR and LNR control. Donetsk is the large city in the centre of the image. Luhansk is in the northeast, close to the Russian border. The situation depicted on the map did not change in a fundamental way between 2015 and the end of 2017. At the time of this writing, the territorial dispute remains at a stalemate, although the war itself is far from over. Fatal altercations between DNR, LNR, Ukrainian and Russian troops continue to take place, along with peace negotiations, prisoner exchanges and occasional reconciliation attempts.

The Donbas war has been the subject of much political and journalistic discussion, particularly in light of the conflict's major geopolitical implications. In popular media, the conflict is regularly referred to as a harbinger of a "new Cold War"[8]. Hot topics include the effects of the crisis on Russo-Western relations[9], its consequences for Ukraine's status as an emerging Western ally[10], and the ways in which the conflict has affected global energy politics[11]. Others study the Donbas war as a nexus of a global information war, in which political actors seek to shape both global and local public opinion by way of targeted influence campaigns[12]. In addition, the unilateral declarations of "independence" by the DNR and LNR have evoked intense discussion about identity in Donbas: do its peoples see themselves as Ukrainian, Russian, Donbassian, or something else altogether? And how have the war and the battle for dominance in the information space affected this identity?[13]. There is an urgent need

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[6] Nikolai Mitrokhin, "Gang Warfare and State Building: The Future of the Donbass [Bandenkrieg Und Staatsbildung: Zur Zukunft Des Donbass]," *Osteuropa* 65, no. 1–2 (2015): 5–19, https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84929649326&partnerID=40&md5=2f7137dbcf0b742287090e52a4e43453.

[7] New York Times, "Ukraine Crisis in Maps," www.nytimes.com, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/02/27/world/europe/ukraine-divisions-crimea.html.

[8] Patrick Wintour, Luke Harding, and Julian Borger, "Cold War 2.0: How Russia and the West Reheated a Historic Struggle," *The Guardian*, October 24, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/24/cold-war-20-how-russia-and-the-west-reheated-a-historic-struggle.

[9] Balázs Jarábik et al., "The EU and Ukraine: Taking a Breath," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 2018, https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/02/27/eu-and-ukraine-taking-breath-pub-75648

[10] Riccardo Alcaro, "West-Russia Relations in Light of the Ukraine Crisis," 2015, http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iairp_18.pdf

[11] Frank Umbach, "Russian-Ukrainian-EU Gas Conflict: Who Stands to Lose Most?," NATO Review Magazine, 2014, https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2014/nato-energy-security-running-on-empty/Ukrainian-conflict-Russia-annexation-of-Crimea/EN/index.htm.

[12] Yevgeniy Golovchenko, Mareike Hartmann, and Rebecca Adler-Nissen, "State, Media and Civil Society in the Information Warfare over Ukraine: Citizen Curators of Digital Disinformation," *International Affairs* 94, no. 5 (2018): 975–94, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiy148; B. Van Niekerk, *Information Warfare in the 2013-2014 Ukraine Crisis*, *Cybersecurity Policies and Strategies for Cyberwarfare Prevention*, 2015, https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-4666-8456-0.ch012; Joanna Szostek, "The Power and Limits of Russia's Strategic Narrative in Ukraine: The Role of Linkage," *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 2 (2017): 379–395, https://doi.org/10.1017/S153759271700007X.

[13] Gwendolyn Sasse and Alice Lackner, "War and Identity: The Case of the Donbas in Ukraine," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 34, no. 2–3 (2018): 139–57, https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2018.1452209.

to confront these questions, with a view to the position of the Donbas war as a 21st-century conflict in which battlefields exist not only in military but also in informational theatres[14]. The conflict is a window into how conflict, information and identity construction interact in the modern world.

Such questions also have important implications not only for our knowledge of the Donbas region but also about the future of the conflict and its impact on identity. Yet despite the political, cultural and academic magnitude of the Donbas war, it remains rare for scholars or journalists to look at what is happening *inside* the DNR and LNR. Surprisingly, almost no work has been published about the matter of how the DNR and LNR talk about themselves, and how they justify and elaborate on their own identity and legitimacy, both internally and externally. These largely unanswered questions are at the heart of this dissertation.

Based on extensive research drawing on tens of thousands of news articles, internal correspondence and hundreds of pages of legal documents, I argue that the DNR and LNR authorities have engendered a collective identity that is heavily focused on a detailed description of the outgroup, or the "other", and leaves the ingroup, or the "we", underdefined. As the authorities put effort into developing (or projecting the development of) political structures required to project legal legitimacy[15] (such as legislative institutions, a body of laws and regulations, and especially an active and sprawling media landscape), they invested little in shaping and defining a communal self, and left it semantically impoverished. Over the four years of the conflict that I look at in this dissertation, all attempts to build a consistent collective identity have been tactical and short-lived, vocalised rarely and inconsistently on the pages of local newspapers and websites despite occasional references to it in official discourse and internal correspondence. Meanwhile, the outgroup, or the "they" that opposes the "we", was subject to a highly detailed and rich discursive construction. Contrary to expectations, this discourse is not wholly anti-Ukrainian, as the outgroup is not a stable target. Instead, it draws in part on its own conceptions of what it means to be Ukrainian,

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[14] Kathy Crilley, "Information Warfare: New Battle Fields Terrorists, Propaganda and the Internet," *Aslib Proceedings* 53, no. 7 (September 1, 2001): 250–64, https://doi.org/10.1108/EUM0000000007059.
[15] Christopher A Thomas, "The Uses and Abuses of Legitimacy in International Law," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 34, no. 4 (2014): 734; Tom R Tyler, "Psychological Perspectives on Legitimacy and Legitimation," *Annual Review of Psychology* 57, no. 1 (November 30, 2005): 375–400, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.57.102904.190038.

advancing the idea that this identity has been usurped by a small group of radicals unrepresentative of the rest of the country. Internally (addressing the local population), this outgroup-focused discourse hearkened back to past conflicts, primarily World War II, and projected a sense of guilt on the part of Ukraine towards Donbas. Externally (addressing audiences outside of the DNR and LNR), this discourse ignored history altogether, and instead projected a sense of shame rather than guilt, discrediting Ukraine in the eyes of external observers without reference to a shared connection that was lost.

0.2 Chapter outline

This dissertation advances existing knowledge about the Donbas conflict, identity building in times of war, and the role of media in identity construction, by being the first to pursue a comprehensive assessment of identity construction in DNR and LNR media. I will do so by focusing on the use of the mass media to spread identity discourse and to build legal legitimacy. Section 0.3 below discusses this dissertation's conceptual framework, for which I draw on past scholarship about (national) identity, the role of the mass media in its construction, and how the presence of military conflict changes these dynamics. Section 0.4 discusses the prior scholarship about the Donbas conflict, local identity, and the role played herein by Ukrainian, Russian and local media.

I make use of a variety of methodologies from both social and computer science that require some elaboration. Section 0.5.1 and 0.5.2 lay out the quantitative methods used to extract information from large corpora of news articles. I then explore how I have used these methods to inform the more qualitative process of identifying narratives and discourses in section 0.5.3. Sections 0.5.4 and 0.5.5 explain how the data was collected, prepared and processed.

The heart of this dissertation consists of 5 chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 are primarily about the attempts to construct the political and legal legitimacy of the DNR and LNR. Chapter 1 traces how the DNR and LNR's political and media landscapes were first destroyed, and then rebuilt almost from scratch after the outbreak of the conflict in 2014. I will focus particularly on the matter of political ideology, and the various

conceptions of identity that have been put forward in service of the historical legitimacy of the DNR and LNR. Chapter 2 looks at the construction of legitimacy through the lens of media legislation. Over the years, the DNR and LNR authorities have passed a large number of laws, decrees and other legal documents to regulate the mass media. I will show that these efforts have led to an authoritarian regulatory landscape leveraged to build ideological support. The ideology that is promoted in this legislation, however, has remained a blank slate. Taken together, chapters 1 and 2 highlight the degree of control that the DNR and LNR authorities have sought to exercise both over their respective media landscapes and the means available to them to build legitimacy. Chapters 3, 4 and 5, then, focus on media content. Chapter 3 is a case study of local media in Kramatorsk, a city in Donetsk oblast that was occupied by DNR forces for 3 months in 2014 and subsequently recaptured by the Ukrainian army. It traces the various identity narratives in the city, and how these changed over time as the occupation came and went. Chapter 4 looks at print media and identity construction in the DNR and LNR. Using a corpus of 26 local newspapers, I analyse what narratives are projected to local residents inside DNR and LNR territory, and what kinds of identity discourse are employed within these narratives. Chapter 5 follows narrative construction in DNR and LNR internet media, thus allowing for a comparison between content that is aimed at local residents (in newspapers) and content that is also aimed at external audiences (on news websites). Across these three chapters, I will show that the attempts to build and project legitimacy have not translated into a sustained effort to build a local identity in DNR and LNR media. Instead, it has had an asymmetrical external focus. I will finish with some concluding remarks about the DNR and LNR as ideological projects that never were, and the implications of this dissertation for the study of nationalism, conflict, media and identity.

In the interest of openness and replicability, this dissertation comes with an online supplement with additional information that could not be included in the main body of the dissertation, including the full corpora of news articles, translations and summaries of legal documents, and analysis scripts in Python. This supplement is available for request via the University of Cambridge's Symplectic Elements data repository[16]. I will refer to this supplement throughout the dissertation, where appropriate.

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[16] The link to this supplement can be found here: https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.52039

0.3 National identity, conflict and the role of mass media

Fundamentally, the research questions addressed in this dissertation relate to the construction of legitimacy and identity through the mass media, especially in times of war. It is therefore useful to discuss how previous work has addressed these topics. The field of scholarship that has had the most impact in this regard is nationalism studies. Many notable thinkers such as Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, Liah Greenfeld and others have weighed in on *how* national identities emerge, what role the media play in this regard, and how these processes are affected by the presence of violent conflict. While I do not wish to presume that the identity in the DNR and LNR has a "national" character per se, I will draw on prior work by nationalism scholars to provide a conceptual framework combining (national) identity construction, media production and armed conflict.

In this section, I will first discuss what elements make up a national identity. I will then examine how scholars have sought to answer the question of why nations emerge in the first place, paying attention to the role of political elites in identity construction in democratic and non-democratic societies. And finally, I will go into the "construction tools" that are necessary for constructing an identity, and the role of the mass media as powerful suppliers of such tools.

0.3.1 Nationalism and identity

It is widely recognised by nationalism scholars that national identity is predicated on a collective belief that the members of a particular nation share certain characteristics or attributes that they consider to be non-trivial[17]. What exactly these attributes are is to an extent arbitrary: language, for example, can serve as a building block for national identity, but does not necessarily do so (e.g. English and "Englishes" or Dutch and Flemish). This ostensible arbitrariness prompted Benedict Anderson to posit the concept of the nation as an "imagined community": a nation exists because it is imagined by those who consider themselves part of it as both inherently limited and

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[17] David Miller, "National Identity," in *On Nationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), https://doi.org/10.1093/0198293569.003.0002.; John Hutchinson, *War and Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).; Thomas Blank and Peter Schmidt, "National Identity in a United Germany: Nationalism or Patriotism? An Empirical Test with Representative Data," *Political Psychology* 24, no. 2 (2003): 289–312, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3792352.; Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: SAGE Publications Inc, 1995).

sovereign[18]. But a shared belief in common attributes is not sufficient to give shape to a national identity. In addition to the collective belief in shared attributes mentioned above, David Miller argues that in order to distinguish national identities from regional and local identities on the one hand, and states on the other, nations must also meet the following conditions[19]:

- Historical continuity; or the re-appropriation of past actions by members of the nation in the present day (e.g. historical tragedies or glories; see also Halbwachs[20] and Greenfeld[21]).
- An active identity; in essence, nations become what they are by making decisions, good or bad. These decisions then become woven into the fabric of national identity over time.
- A geographical location; where ethnic or religious groups might have certain places that are considered of particular importance, such as a temple or a natural monument, nations are bound to a homeland, in aspiration if not in reality.
- A "common public culture"; a series of shared understandings about how members of the nation live their lives individually and as a group.

While Miller's categorisation is by no means universally accepted[22], it provides a usable framework for determining the elements of a national identity. More relevant to the discussion at hand is the question of the origins of national identity: why would we find it helpful to identify with a nation to begin with? Social psychologists have long held that the explanation for the emergence of group identities (broadly defined) has its roots in human group behaviour. Social Identity Theory, developed in the 1970s, states that "in many social situations people think of themselves and others as group members, rather than as unique individuals"[23]. Flowing forth from this framework are the concepts of "ingroup" and "outgroup". An ingroup is a group which an individual

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[18] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 1st ed. (London: Verso, 1983), 49.

[19] Miller, "National Identity."

[20] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1992).

[21] Liah Greenfeld, "Nationalism and Modernity," *Social Research* 63, no. 1 (1996): 11, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40972337.

[22] Thomas Hylland Eriksen, "Nationalism and the Internet," *Nations and Nationalism* 13, no. 1 (2007): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2007.00273.x.; Rudolf De Cillia, Martin Reisigl, and Ruth Wodak, "The Discursive Construction of National Identities," *Discourse & Society* 10, no. 2 (April 1, 1999): 149–73, https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926599010002002.

[23] Naomi Ellemers and S Alexander Haslam, "Social Identity Theory," in *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology: Volume 2*, ed. P.A. Van Lange, A.W. Kruglanski, and E.T. Higgins (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2012), https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249222 NV - 2.

considers themselves to be a member of, whereas an outgroup is a group with which the individual does not feel kinship[24]. Ingroup identification and intergroup differentiation are naturally key to the development of national identity. People tend to think positively of themselves and the groups they belong to, and therefore evaluate positively the "nation" that they see themselves as being part of[25].

On the other hand, Social Identity Theory also predicts "a positive correlation between ingroup identification and intergroup differentiation, which implies that national identification and the derogation of other nations should co-occur"[26]. Mummendey and colleagues state that "national identification and ingroup evaluation only show a reliable relationship with outgroup rejection under an intergroup comparison orientation" [27]. In other words, national identity is also to a large extent associated with a rejection of and/or hostility to outgroups[28]. Zygmunt Bauman argues much the same in pointing out that nations typically demarcate clear lines between those who are considered friends and those who are considered enemies. Problems arise when objectionable elements (e.g. "strangers") reside among friends, particularly in the pursuit of a homogeneous order[29]. The German sociologist Klaus Eder's concept of "narrative borders" is also in line with this thinking. Eder states that the boundaries between groups of people (e.g. nations) emerge because the stories that people tell about themselves and others "make sense" and have "narrative plausibility"[30].

Of course, this dynamic of ingroup versus outgroup is not exclusive to national identity[31]. What are therefore the main lines of argument pertaining to the emergence of national identities more specifically? Some have argued that nations and national identities are modern concepts that gained importance around or after the industrial

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[24] Henri Tajfel, "Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations," *Annual Review of Psychology* 33, no. 1 (1982): 1–39.

[25] Amélie Mummendey, Andreas Klink, and Rupert Brown, "Nationalism and Patriotism: National Identification and out-Group Rejection," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 40, no. 2 (2001): 159–72, https://doi.org/10.1348/014466601164740.

[26] Nick Hopkins, "National Identity: Pride and Prejudice?," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 40, no. 2 (2010): 183–86, https://doi.org/10.1348/014466601164795.

[27] Mummendey, Klink, and Brown, "Nationalism and Patriotism: National Identification and out-Group Rejection."

[28] Tajfel, "Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations."; Blank and Schmidt, "National Identity in a United Germany: Nationalism or Patriotism? An Empirical Test with Representative Data."

[29] Zygmunt Bauman, "Modernity and Ambivalence," *Theory, Culture & Society* 7, no. 2–3 (1990): 153.; Philip Schlesinger, "Media, the Political Order and National Identity," *Media, Culture and Society* 13 (1991): 301.

[30] Klaus Eder, "Europe's Borders," *European Journal of Social Theory* 9, no. 2 (2006): 255–71, https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431006063345.

[31] Schlesinger, "Media, the Political Order and National Identity," 300.

revolution[32]. Benedict Anderson, for example, sees the advent of capitalism, and along with it rising literacy rates and a growing demand for vernacular literature, as fundamental factors in the rise of national consciousness[33]. Other scholars in this modernist school of nationalism studies, including Eric Hobsbawm[34], Karl Deutsch[35], Eugen Weber[36] and Ernest Gellner[37], are mostly in agreement, arguing that modern developments such as homogenised educational systems, linguistic unification, and improved communications were essential elements in the emergence of national identity.

Although much less popular since the end of World War II, the idea that nations are predicated on deep-seated cultural, ethnic, or historical roots has continued to hold some sway[38]. John Hutchinson, for example, claims that nations in some cases took on a "sacred" quality (through their association with the Crusades, for example) in the pre-modern era, which then influenced states' decision-making, particularly within the context of war[39]. In this primordialist interpretation, national identity is to some extent immutable, and the emergence of nation states is seen as a natural consequence of a people's long-standing ties to a certain ethnicity and/or geographical location. A nation state is thus a consequence, and not a cause, of existing identifications, behaviours, historical referents, attributes and practices.

Not only primordialist scholars are sceptical of the modernist wing of nationalism studies. Liah Greenfeld[40] argues that nationalism preceded industrialisation, the institutionalisation of capitalism, as well as the development of the modern state. Nationality, she claims, is not a function of modernity, but merely a contingent possibility that became dominant. Over time, the concepts of "people" and "nation"

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[32] Craig Calhoun, "Nationalism and Ethnicity," *Annual Review of Sociology* 19 (1993): 212–13, https://is.muni.cz/el/1490/jaro2014/CZS13/um/2_Calhoun_Nationalism.pdf.; Geoffrey Best, *Honour Among Men and Nations: Transformations of an Idea* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1982), 29.

[33] Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 37–39.

[34] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[35] Karl Wolfgang Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry Into the Foundation of Nationality*, MIT Press Paperback (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966), https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=RSzTnQEACAAJ.

[36] Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976).

[37] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

[38] John Coakley, "'Primordialism' in Nationalism Studies: Theory or Ideology?," *Nations and Nationalism* 24, no. 2 (2018): 327–47, https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12349.; Steven Grosby, "Debate: The Verdict of History: The Inexpungeable Tie of Primordiality - a Response to Eller and Coughlan," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17, no. 1 (1994): 164–71, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.1994.9993817.

[39] Hutchinson, *War and Nationalism*..

[40] Greenfeld, "Nationalism and Modernity," 8–9.

became equated, and the peasants, farmers and other "common folk", who in feudal times were referred to derogatively by elites, were elevated in their standing by virtue of their membership of a stratified but in essence homogeneous nation[41].

The concept within nationalism theory that is most relevant to this dissertation pertains to the notion of identity construction: if one favours the primordialist view, then national identity is a pre-existing, possibly latent conception that either already exists in the minds of its subjects or merely requires activation. After all, primordialism proposes that a person's identification with a piece of territory, ethnicity, shared history or common culture is to an extent naturally engrained. With these conditions in place, it is not too difficult to meet the remaining of Miller's conditions for nationhood mentioned above[42], namely an active identity and a belief in commonly shared attributes. Crudely put, the primordialist view sets forth that "constructing" a national identity is either barely necessary (because it is already mostly there) or next to impossible.

On the other hand, for those who prefer the modernist view, national identity can be brought into existence without the necessity for a proto-nation that is already being imagined by its subjects. In this view, it becomes possible to construct a national identity through for example the use of symbols, history or sports[43]. Identity construction may be grounded in some kind of historical reality, but historical accuracy is not considered a key element to successful identity building: more important is how a story about, say, a people's past is told and retold both within and outside of the nation's (real or imagined) borders.

In this dissertation, I draw mostly on work from the modernist school, not necessarily because it is more convincing than primordialist interpretations, but because I deal with the matter of identity building. I make use of what Klaus Eder calls the "minimalist" theory of identity, which states that "anything can serve as a boundary between identities within a historically specific situation"[44]. I do this in order to do justice to the

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[41] Ibid., 11.
[42] Miller, "National Identity."
[43] Aurélie Campana, "The Effects of War on the Chechen National Identity Construction," *National Identities* 8, no. 2 (2006): 129–48, https://doi.org/10.1080/14608940600703759.campa; Marina Henrikson, "Nation-Building in Times of Conflict: The Discursive Construction of Russian National Identity through the Russo-Georgian War" (University of Manchester, 2016).; De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak, "The Discursive Construction of National Identities."
[44] Eder, "Europe's Borders."

agnosticism of this project by not making presuppositions about the nature of DNR and LNR identity: identity discourse can use any starting point as its foundation, be it historical, outgroup-focused, bureaucratic or emotional. Furthermore, what serves as a building block in the discursive identity building process is flexible, and may range from historical references to sports, art, laws or politics. Throughout this dissertation, I therefore employ a simple categorisation to parse the concept of identity discourse: discursive ingroup and outgroup *identity markers* (e.g. words such as "we", "they", "our"); *attributes* (language, religion, heroism, etc.); *practices* with a semiotic purpose (sports, arts, performances, commemoration, rituals); *imports* (borrowings from historical contexts, e.g. "New Russia" or "Novorossiia"); and *locations* (how places such as Donbas, Donetsk and Luhansk are framed and discussed).

0.3.2 Nationalism, politics and war

While the underlying origins of national identity remain disputed, there is broadly shared agreement that in the modern era, national identity is a fundamentally political project[45], with political elites playing a key role[46]. Pierre Bourdieu considers bureaucracy and education to lie at the heart of how national identity is constructed from the top[47]. Bourdieu's view is shared by many of the aforementioned theorists, including Eugen Weber[48], Greenfeld[49], Anderson[50] and Hobsbawm[51]. To borrow from Benedict Anderson's vocabulary: the nation is imagined for the people, by elites. This dissertation focuses especially on the role of political elites in the shaping of national identity through the media. Whether future research will shift the ongoing debate between primordialists and modernists in one direction or the other is not immediately relevant to the questions that I pursue here. Instead, what matters is that ruling elites engage in some kind of attempt at constructing an identity, regardless of the origins of the identity that is being constructed.

Bourdieu and others see national identity construction principally as a long-term endeavour, in which key roles are played by long-acting, temporally stable processes

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[45] Anthony D Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 7–8.
[46] Calhoun, "Nationalism and Ethnicity."
[47] Pierre Bourdieu, "Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field," *Sociological Theory* 12, no. 1 (1994): 1–18.; De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak, "The Discursive Construction of National Identities," 156.
[48] Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*.
[49] Greenfeld, "Nationalism and Modernity."
[50] Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.
[51] Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*.

such as education and bureaucracy. From this perspective, the nation emerges in the minds of its people, given enough time and nourishment from the top. Others argue that nations are constructed not only through long-acting processes but with the help of catalysts. David Laitin proposes a so-called "tipping model" for what he calls "national cascades", or moments of rapid historical change that fuel developments in national identifications[52]. One such catalyst is military conflict. Theorists like Barry Posen[53], Michael Mann[54] and Charles Tilly[55] see the emergence of (European) nations as a function of the centralising pressures fuelled by the late medieval/early modern developments in military capacity and tactics[56]. In other words, wars are what built the nations of today. Rogers Brubaker and Marina Henrikson both see military engagements as a strong catalyst for identity construction, arguing that war has the potential for identities to "suddenly crystallise" than "gradually develop as a frame of vision and a basis for collective action"[57]. Although wars are not necessarily "generative" of citizenship or national identification[58], existing identities may be revisited in wartime and serve as markers for fostering support for one side or the other[59].

0.3.3 Media and identity construction

The above discussion leads to the question of *how* identities are constructed. As mentioned before, scholars such as Bourdieu emphasise the importance of long-acting processes such as education and bureaucracy, through which conceptions of (national) identity permeate down to the level of individual citizens. These, however, are by no means the only tools available, particularly in cases where external and/or internal pressures (e.g. a military conflict) increase the necessity for short-acting identity construction methods. Here, a key role is played by communications

[52] David D Laitin, "National Cascades," in *Nations, States, and Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199228232.003.0002.

[53] Barry R Posen, "Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power," *International Security* 18, no. 2 (1993): 80–124, https://doi.org/10.2307/2539098.

[54] Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power, Vol. 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).; Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power, Vol. 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[55] Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990-1990* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1992).; Charles Tilly, "States and Nationalism in Europe, 1492-1992," in *Perspectives on Nationalism*, ed. J L Comaroff and P C Stern (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1995), 187–204.

[56] Hutchinson, *War and Nationalism*, 3.

[57] Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19–20.; Henrikson, "Nation-Building in Times of Conflict: The Discursive Construction of Russian National Identity through the Russo-Georgian War," 46.

[58] Hutchinson, *War and Nationalism*, 49.

[59] Nicholas Sambanis, Stergios Skaperdas, and William C Wohlforth, "Nation-Building through War," *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 2 (2015): 279–96, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000088.

technologies, particularly the mass media[60]. As argued by Michael Chan, it is possible to discursively categorise intergroup relations through the media, and in so doing shape audiences' perception of the conflict vis-à-vis the "other"[61].

Television, newspapers, radio and more recently the internet are among the most important ways through which elites can reach audiences[62]. Local media, which are the main source of data in this dissertation, play a particularly significant role in this process of narrative construction and identity building. To quote Morris Janowitz:

> The community newspaper's emphasis on community routines, low controversy and social ritual are the very characteristics that account for its readership.[63]

Rasmus Kleis Nielsen adds that community media, of which local media is a form (the difference being that community media cater to any community, not necessarily geographical), should be seen as *keystone media*, as their role is not only to provide certain specific kinds of information to local populations, but also to provide other (i.e. national or international) media outlets with source material for their stories[64]. At a time when the internet and large media conglomerates are becoming more important as the main sources of news, local media are increasingly the only news organisations that pay attention to local events and serve as curators of local identities. By telling and retelling stories that reflect common values within the community, and by reporting personal news items that national and international media have little interest in, local media build municipal consensus and a communal sense of belonging[65].

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[60] Rabea Hass, "The Role of Media in Conflict and Their Influence on Securitisation," *The International Spectator* 44, no. 4 (2009): 77–91.; Michael Bromley, "Nationalism in Local Media During International Conflict: Text Mining Domestic News Reports of the China–Philippines Maritime Dispute," in *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime*, ed. Stuart Allan and Barbie Zelizer (London: Routledge, 2004), 224–43.; Emrys Schoemaker and Nicole Stremlau, "Media and Conflict: An Assessment of the Evidence," *Progress in Development Studies* 14, no. 2 (2014): 181–95, https://doi.org/10.1177/1464993413517790.; Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry Into the Foundation of Nationality.*; De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak, "The Discursive Construction of National Identities," 154.

[61] Michael Chan, "(Re)categorizing Intergroup Relations and Social Identities Through News Discourse: The Case of the China Daily's Reporting on Regional Conflict," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 33, no. 2 (2014): 144–64, https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X13508125.

[62] Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1988).; Claude Salhani, "Media in Conflict: Inciting Violence in Kosovo," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 7, no. 1 (2006): 33–39, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43133658.

[63] Morris Janowitz, *The Community Press in an Urban Setting: The Social Elements of Urbanism* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1967), 130. See also Kristy Hess and Lisa Waller, *Local Journalism in a Digital World* (London: Palgrave, 2017), 8.

[64] Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, "Local Newspapers as Keystone Media: The Increased Importance of Diminished Newspapers for Local Political Information Environments," in *Local Journalism: The Decline of Newspapers and the Rise of Digital Media*, ed. Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2015), 51.

[65] Janowitz, *The Community Press in an Urban Setting: The Social Elements of Urbanism.*); Bob Franklin and David Murphy, "Changing Times: Local Newspapers, Technology and Markets," in *Local Journalism and Local Media: Making the Local News*, ed. Bob Franklin and David Murphy (London: Routledge, 1998), 8

The role of the mass media in identity construction in democratic societies, where political elites are not able to impose strict censorship, is a relatively underexplored wing of identity studies, although the matter has previously been covered by scholars such as Alice Hall[66], Philip Schlesinger[67] and Hsu Chien-Jung[68]. Schlesinger, for example, sees the media as a "battlefield, [a space in which] contests for various forms of dominance take place". Media in democratic societies are, by necessity, part of the public domain and therefore "objects of public policy-making and legal action"[69]. At the same time, audiences in democracies are not exclusively exposed to content produced within national boundaries. Instead, as argued by Richard Collins, cultural communities can be constructed vertically (from political elites on down) as well as horizontally (across different cultures and societies, e.g. by broadcasting foreign television programmes)[70]. Thus, political elites in democratic societies are but one set of actors in competition with both local and international forces, each of which seeking to construct some form of identity via the media. Viewed in this light, Bourdieu's assessment that education and bureaucracy are more stable factors in top-down identity construction is especially powerful[71].

The story is quite different in nations and territories without free media. History is replete with examples of authoritarian regimes taking control of media content production and dissemination in order to foster tacit and/or explicit support from the populace[72]. In non-democratic societies, access to foreign media is more easily blocked in order to shield citizens from being exposed to criticism of the regime or ostensibly malicious foreign influence. To name one example, the *New York Times* website, as well as many other international news outlets, has been inaccessible in mainland China since 2012[73]. In a similar vein, political elites in non-democratic

[66] Alice Hall, "The Mass Media, Cultural Identity and Perceptions of National Character: An Analysis of Frames in US and Canadian Coverage of Audiovisual Materials in the GATT," *Gazette (Leiden, Netherlands)* 62, no. 3–4 (July 1, 2000): 231–49, https://doi.org/10.1177/0016549200062003004.
[67] Schlesinger, "Media, the Political Order and National Identity."
[68] Chien-Jung Hsu, *The Construction of National Identity in Taiwan's Media, 1896-2012* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2014).
[69] Schlesinger, "Media, the Political Order and National Identity," 299.
[70] Richard Collins, "National Culture: A Contradiction in Terms?," in *Television: Policy and Culture*, ed. Richard Collins (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 213.; Schlesinger, "Media, the Political Order and National Identity," 305.
[71] Bourdieu, "Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field."
[72] Joseph Goebbels, "Speech to the 1934 Nuremberg Party Rally," in *Propaganda. Volume 1: Historical Origins, Definitions and the Changing Nature of Propaganda*, ed. P.R. Baines and N.J. O'Shaughnessy (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1934), 151–58.; H J Ingram, "A Brief History of Propaganda During Conflict," ICCT Research Paper (The Hague, 2016), https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ICCT-Haroro-Ingram-Brief-History-Propaganda-June-2016-4.pdf.; Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda & Persuasion*, 6th ed. (New York, NY: SAGE Publications Inc, 2015).
[73] Craig S. Smith, "The New York Times vs. the 'Great Firewall' of China," *The New York Times*, March 31, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/31/insider/the-new-york-times-vs-the-great-firewall-of-china.html.

societies may impose censorship at the local level as well, for example by selectively issuing broadcasting or publication licences, removing content from the internet, or shutting down certain outlets altogether. Identity construction through the media in non-democratic societies is thus much more vertical than in democratic societies. The authorities have direct influence over what narratives and discourses the public is exposed to, and are in less competition with other local and international actors.

In times of military conflict, the media's role in identity construction becomes more pronounced as a method for building legitimacy. Referring back to Social Identity Theory, we can discern two broad strategies that political elites employ to legitimise themselves. The first strategy focuses on the ingroup (i.e. the members of the 'nation' engaged in conflict). Political elites seek support for the war effort from the local populace, an effect known as "rally round the flag"[74]. This effect, in turn, also has two dimensions: on the one hand, elites seek to foster support by exposing audiences to common identity practices, attributes and imports such as a shared history, language and culture. As argued by Billig[75], De Cillia and colleagues[76] and Henrikson[77], such identity discourse can be uncovered by looking at recurring words, phrases and concepts that reflect either commonality (when looking at the ingroup) or estrangement (when looking at the outgroup). For example, the use of ingroup and outgroup identity markers like "we" and "they", and what characteristics are assigned to both, is a useful way of identifying identity discourse[78]. The same can be done by looking for shared attributes, imports and practices in media coverage that give shape to a collective identity.

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[74] Claire E Taylor, Jung-Sook Lee, and William R Davie, "Local Press Coverage of Environmental Conflict," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (2000): 175–92, https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900007700113.; Salhani, "Media in Conflict: Inciting Violence in Kosovo."; Cristina Jayme Montiel et al., "Nationalism in Local Media During International Conflict: Text Mining Domestic News Reports of the China–Philippines Maritime Dispute," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 33, no. 5 (2014): 445–64, https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X14542435.; Stephen D Reese and Bob Buckalew, "The Militarism of Local Television: The Routine Framing of the Persian Gulf War," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, no. 1 (1995): 40–59, https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039509366918.; Malcolm Mitchell, *Propaganda, Polls, and Public Opinion: Are the People Manipulated?* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970).; D. Deacon and P. Golding, *Taxation and Representation* (London: John Libby, 1994).; Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*.
[75] Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.
[76] De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak, "The Discursive Construction of National Identities."
[77] Henrikson, "Nation-Building in Times of Conflict: The Discursive Construction of Russian National Identity through the Russo-Georgian War."
[78] Andrei A Tarnavskii and Ol'ga G Filatova, "Analiz Publichnogo Diskursa v Rossiiskikh Sotsial'nykh Setiakh Vokrug Konflikta v Donbasse," in *Sbor Nauchnikh Stat'ei XVIII Ob'edinennoi konferentsii "Internet I Sovremennoe obshchestvo" IMS-2015* (Saint-Petersburg: Universitet ITMO, 2015), 140–55, https://openbooks.ifmo.ru/ru/file/2227/2227.pdf.

On the other hand, elites seek to demonise the opposing side in the conflict (the outgroup), in order to instil fright, antagonism or antipathy towards the enemy[79]. Doing so increases local support for the ruling authorities, as the current rulers, however unpopular they may be, are preferable to the prospect of a potentially cruel enemy winning the conflict. In addition, third parties must also be taken into account. It is in the interest of the warring authorities that the international community (that is: parties not participating in the conflict, often referred to in the Social Identity Theory literature as "third party mediators"[80]) see the conflict as a battle between two more or less legitimate groups[81]. If a party is seen by international decision makers as having legitimate grievances or as having a strong (national or not) identity that is under attack, conflict resolution attempts and media coverage of the conflict take on a different character than if one or both sides fail to project a convincing set of justifications for engaging in the conflict. This way, outward-aiming media strategies can be employed to build international legitimacy. Second, outward-aiming coverage can be used for purposes of demonising the enemy[82], not only to demoralise it but also to delegitimise it in the eyes of third party observers[83]. Such an outgroup-focused media strategy thus aims to shape public opinion outside of the local space in order to position oneself favourably (and the opponent unfavourably) towards outside audiences[84]. To do so, media coverage aimed outward must project a sense of (national) identity and, perhaps even more importantly, discursive unity[85].

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[79] Bromley, "Nationalism in Local Media During International Conflict: Text Mining Domestic News Reports of the China–Philippines Maritime Dispute."; Chan, "(Re)categorizing Intergroup Relations and Social Identities Through News Discourse: The Case of the China Daily's Reporting on Regional Conflict."; Rom Harré et al., "Recent Advances in Positioning Theory," *Theory & Psychology* 19, no. 1 (2009): 5–31, https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354308101417.; Juan Li, "Intertextuality and National Identity: Discourse of National Conflicts in Daily Newspapers in the United States and China," *Discourse & Society* 20, no. 1 (2009): 85–121, https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926508097096.; Mitchell, *Propaganda, Polls, and Public Opinion: Are the People Manipulated?*; Montiel et al., "Nationalism in Local Media During International Conflict: Text Mining Domestic News Reports of the China–Philippines Maritime Dispute."; Liza Tsaliki, "The Media and the Construction of an `Imagined Community': The Role of Media Events on Greek Television," *European Journal of Communication* 10, no. 3 (1995): 345–70, https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323195010003003.
[80] Ray Block Jr, Paul Hensel, and David A. Siegel, "The Impact of Social Identity on Third-Party Mediation" (Tallahassee, FL: Department of Political Science at Florida State University, Tallahassee, 2009), http://www.paulhensel.org/Research/BHS09.pdf.
[81] Kingsley Edney, "Soft Power and the Chinese Propaganda System," *Journal of Contemporary China* 21, no. 78 (2012): 899–914, https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2012.701031.
[82] Ingram, "A Brief History of Propaganda During Conflict."
[83] Szostek, "The Power and Limits of Russia's Strategic Narrative in Ukraine: The Role of Linkage."
[84] Salhani, "Media in Conflict: Inciting Violence in Kosovo," 34.; Amartya Sen, "The Role of the Media and Communication," in *Peace and Democratic Society*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Open Book Publishers, 2007), 95, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vjstn.11.; Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda & Persuasion*, 50.
[85] Lindsay H Hoffman, "When the World Outside Gets Inside Your Head: The Effects of Media Context on Perceptions of Public Opinion," *Communication Research* 40, no. 4 (2013): 463–85, https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650211435938.; Robert M Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51–58, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x.; Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda & Persuasion*, 52.

0.4 Donbas identity and the conflict in history, media studies and identity scholarship

While Donbas as an object of academic research has gained popularity since the start of the conflict, work on local identities in the Donets Basin prior to 2014 has been relatively sparse. Hiroaki Kuromiya, the most well-known historian of Donbas, has argued that the region has long been a haven for fugitives, outcasts, anarchists and others seeking to escape authority[86]. As a borderland wedged between Ukraine and Russia, where coal mines and heavy industry dominate the scenery, Donbas is, in Kuromiya's view, the literal and symbolic "last frontier of Europe". The region is the least amenable to Western cultural and democratic values due to, *inter alia*, the long history of violence, political repression and purges that have plagued Donbas since it first became inhabited in the mid-17th century[87]. Before the 1917 revolution, Donbas was the locus for large-scale anti-Jewish pogroms and other forms of violent repression, and it was widely represented as a wild, lawless land that provided a safe haven for all types of unsavoury characters. After 1917, the region faced the worst of the famines of the 1920s and 1930s, and millions died from starvation, illness or violence[88]. Today, Kuromiya argues, this history of resistance to outsiders and a fervently independence-minded spirit is still widely shared among Donbas residents.

Iurii Nikolaiets', another scholar of Donbas history and identity, sees an absence of national loyalties as a key characteristic of people in the region[89]. Instead, he argues, the hardships faced by the region's many coal miners and industrial workers instilled a collectivist sentiment that was, for a while at least, compatible with Soviet identity. The idea that Donbas was so important for the rest of the Soviet Union due to its large industrial output was a key element in the formation of a regional identity. After the fall of the Soviet Union, when Donbas became part of Ukraine, the issue of the distribution of economic activity and resources was brought more to the fore, becoming a spearhead for local identity, particularly for those sceptical of the Ukrainian state.

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[86] Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870s-1990s*, Cambridge Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[87] Hiroaki Kuromiya, "The Donbas - The Last Frontier of Europe?," in *Europe's Last Frontier? Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine between Russia and the European Union*, ed. Oliver Schmidtke and Serhy Yekelchyk (London: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2008), 97–114, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-10170-9.

[88] Hiroaki Kuromiya, "Stalinist Terror in the Donbas: A Note," *Slavic Review* 50, no. 1 (1991): 157–162, https://doi.org/10.2307/2500607.

[89] Iurii Nikolaiets', "Rol' Mas-Media Diskursu U Formuvanni Rehional'noï Identychnosti Zhyteliv Donbasu Naprykintsi XX- Na Pochatku XXI St.," *Naukovi Zapysky* 5, no. 67 (2013): 84–108.

Nikolaiets' is broadly in agreement here with Nataliia Pashina[90], who divides Ukrainian identity into two main components: "Ukrainian" and "Soviet". Donbas residents, she argues, display "weakly defined separatist sentiments" that can be nourished and exploited, particularly in times of economic crisis. Mykola Riabchuk identifies the same distinction between a European and an East Slavonic identity archetype, arguing that this identitarian distinction, rather than language or ethnicity, is the fundamental line that divides Ukrainians[91]. Elise Giuliano adds that before 2014, ethnic Russians in Donbas were especially divided on issues of separatism, which was not considered a highly salient topic[92]. Separatist sentiments were not primarily fuelled by identification with Russia or the desire to speak Russian, according to Giuliano; rather, they were spurred more by a sense of abandonment by Kyiv. Gentile, who conducted a large representative survey among residents of Luhansk in 2013, finds a similar distinction between a Soviet and a Western type of identity, with the pro-Western constituency being younger, educated, not usually ethnically Russian, and somewhat more satisfied with life than those with Soviet-like (geopolitical) identities[93]. Employing a more qualitative approach, Alexandr Osipian examines the role of stereotypes held by Ukrainians not from Donbas about Donbas, finding that Donbas residents 1) consider themselves as independent and culturally and economically separate from other parts of Ukraine, but 2) manifest a great deal of confidence in local elites who, crucially, believe their future lies in Ukraine and nowhere else[94].

While there is certainly a scarcity of available work on identity in Donbas before 2014, the idea of Donbas as a region with numerous overlapping identities, not necessarily mutually compatible, carries broad support[95]. There is much more significant disagreement among scholars about the extent to which the sceptical nature of Donbas identities translates into separatist sentiments and/or a desire for independence from Ukraine. As one might expect, this discussion became especially

[90] Nataliia Pashina, "Etnomovnyi Chynnyk Politychnoï Identychnosti v Donbasi," *Politychnyi Menedzhment* 1 (2005): 24–34.
[91] Mykola Riabchuk, "'Two Ukraines' Reconsidered: The End of Ukrainian Ambivalence?," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 15, no. 1 (2015): 138–56, https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12120.
[92] Elise Giuliano, "Who Supported Separatism in Donbas? Ethnicity and Popular Opinion at the Start of the Ukraine Crisis," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 34, no. 2–3 (2018): 158–78, https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2018.1447769.
[93] Michael Gentile, "West Oriented in the East-Oriented Donbas: A Political Stratigraphy of Geopolitical Identity in Luhansk, Ukraine," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 31, no. 3 (2015): 201–23, https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2014.995410.
[94] Alexandr L Osipian, "Why Donbass Votes for Yanukovych: Confronting the Ukrainian Orange Revolution," *Demokratizatsiya* 14, no. 4 (2006): 495–517, https://doi.org/10.3200/DEMO.14.4.495-517.
[95] Irina Aleksandrovna Kudreiko, "Iazykovaia Situatsiia v Donbasse: Sinkhroniia I Diakhroniia," *Izvestiia Volgogradskogo Gosudarstvennogo Pedagogicheskogo Universiteta* 8, no. 131 (2018): 103–9, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/yazykovaya-situatsiya-v-donbasse-sinhroniya-i-diahroniya.

salient after 2014[96]. For example, Ol'ha Kalinovs'ka and her colleagues, most of whom are journalists, were some of the first to attempt to reconstruct a comprehensive timeline of events before and during the conflict[97]. The question as to why separatism "succeeded" in some parts of Donbas and not in others has been addressed through the lens of ethnicity[98], local identity[99], language[100], and Russia's domestic[101], geopolitical[102], and elite[103] interests.

Another body of scholarship examines the roots of the conflict by focusing on Ukraine's internal political dynamics. Both Andrew Wilson[104] and Quentin Buckholz[105] consider the role played by local political elites, particularly members of the "Family" of former president of Ukraine Viktor Ianukovych, to lie at the heart of the question why separatism in Donetsk and Luhansk was "successful". Nikolai Mitrokhin provides a more detailed analysis of the role of these local elites, and argues that at the start of the conflict, Russia was forced to rely on a patchwork of political operatives engaged in fierce competition with each other[106]. For quite some time, Mitrokhin claims, local authorities in the DNR and LNR did not manage to establish a central authority, particularly in Luhansk. By 2017, however, both the DNR and LNR had consolidated into more or less stable dictatorships, with Russia as the prime driving factor behind this process[107]. Serhii Kudelia in part agrees with Wilson and Buckholz's assessment as to the role of local elites, but places the blame for the separatists' success with the

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[96] I Kononov and S Khobta, *Public Opinion in the Donbas and Halychyna on the Ukraine's Upheavals of Winter 2013-Summer 2014*, *Ukraine after the Euromaidan: Challenges and Hopes*, vol. 13, 2015, https://doi.org/10.3726/978-3-0351-0798-2.

[97] Ol'ha Kalinovs'ka et al., *Neoholoshena Viina: Nevidomi Fakty I Khroniky ATO* (Khar'kiv: Knyzhkovyi Klub "Klub Simeinoho Dozvillia," 2015),
https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=EwubCgAAQBAJ&pg=PT596&lpg=PT596&dq=Неоголошена+війна.+Невідомі+факти+і+хроніки+ATO+видавець&source=bl&ots=NEEyWYdT21&sig=ACfU3U2uhGdaXZSe0Q8td42qFBy4Bgao6Q&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiOqeH0gcbkAhXFSRUIHaZWA8MQ6AEwBnoECAkQAQ#.

[98] Giuliano, "Who Supported Separatism in Donbas? Ethnicity and Popular Opinion at the Start of the Ukraine Crisis."

[99] I Stebelsky, "A Tale of Two Regions: Geopolitics, Identities, Narratives, and Conflict in Kharkiv and the Donbas," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 59, no. 1 (2018): 28–50, https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2018.1428904.

[100] Sasse and Lackner, "War and Identity: The Case of the Donbas in Ukraine."

[101] P Robinson, "Russia's Role in the War in Donbass, and the Threat to European Security," *European Politics and Society* 17, no. 4 (2016): 506–21, https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2016.1154229.

[102] A S Bowen, "Coercive Diplomacy and the Donbas: Explaining Russian Strategy in Eastern Ukraine," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2017, 1–32, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2017.1413550.; R S Clem, "Clearing the Fog of War: Public versus Official Sources and Geopolitical Storylines in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 58, no. 6 (2017): 592–612, https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2018.1424006.

[103] T Bukkvoll, "Why Putin Went to War: Ideology, Interests and Decision-Making in the Russian Use of Force in Crimea and Donbas," *Contemporary Politics* 22, no. 3 (2016): 267–82, https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2016.1201310.

[104] Andrew Wilson, "The Donbas in 2014: Explaining Civil Conflict Perhaps, but Not Civil War," *Europe - Asia Studies* 68, no. 4 (2016): 631–52, https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2016.1176994.

[105] Quentin Buckholz, "The Dogs That Didn't Bark: Elite Preferences and the Failure of Separatism in Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk," *Problems of Post-Communism*, 2017, 1–10, https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2017.1367256.

[106] Mitrokhin, "Gang Warfare and State Building: The Future of the Donbass [Bandenkrieg Und Staatsbildung: Zur Zukunft Des Donbass]."

[107] Nikolai Mitrokhin, "Transfer of dictatorship: 'State Building' in Russia's 'People's Republics' [Diktaturtransfer Im Donbass: Gewalt und 'Staatsbildung' in Russlands 'Volksrepubliken']," *Osteuropa* 67, no. 3–4 (2017): 41–55,
https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85024399720&partnerID=40&md5=2e3eaa50da42b0b5e3b6cb579889ef3e.

Ukrainian authorities, who he says alienated the local population by using excessive and indiscriminate force[108]. Sergei Buntovskii, both independently[109] and together with Kheda Karimova[110], agrees with Kudelia's assessment of Ukraine's share of the blame, and adds that the number of pro-Russian organisations that sprang up in Donbas between Ukraine's independence in 1991 and the start of the conflict in 2014 indicates a high degree of local support for separatism. Oleg Onopko[111], who at the time of this writing is working at the Academy of Law in Donetsk (in the DNR), shares Kudelia's view. Ivan Katchanovski[112] mostly avoids assigning blame, and argues that there was simply more popular support for separatism in Donbas than anywhere in Ukraine except Crimea.

With regards to local identity discourse, the concept of "Novorossiia" (see chapter 1) is a rather popular topic of scholarly discussion when talking about the roots of the Donbas conflict. The "brand"[113] or "myth"[114] of Novorossiia as a historical identity import is seen by some as a powerful tool used to justify the insurgency in Donbas. Kimitaka Matsuzato even claims that the "Novorussian" movement, as he calls it, eventually consolidated itself as the DNR and LNR, only abandoning its revolutionary ideals after Russia forced it to sign and partake in the Minsk Agreements[115]. John O'Loughlin and colleagues, who conducted a reasonably large survey among Donbas residents examining the resonance of the idea of Novorossiia, find some degree of support for the idea but also a high degree of scepticism among locals, many of whom call it a "historical myth"[116].

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[108] S Kudelia, "The Donbas Rift," *Russian Politics and Law* 54, no. 1 (2016): 5–27, https://doi.org/10.1080/10611940.2015.1160707.

[109] Sergei Iur'ievich Buntovskii, "Politicheski Orientirovannye Pechatnye SMI Donbassa Ot Raspada SSSR Do Provozglasheniia DNR," in *Sbornik Statei XII Mezhdunarodnoi Nauchno-Prakticheskoi Konferentsii*, 2017, 98–101, https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=30355969.

[110] Sergei Iur'ievich Buntovskii and Kheda Il'iasovna Karimova, "Obshchestvenno-Politicheskie Organizatsii Donbassa Prorusskoi Napravlennosti v Kontse XX - Nachale XXI Veka," *Nauchnyi Zhurnal KubGAU* 124, no. 10 (2016): 1–22, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/obschestvenno-politicheskie-organizatsii-donbassa-prorusskoy-napravlennosti-v-kontse-hh-nachale-hhi-veka.

[111] Oleg V Onopko, "Vneshniaia Politika Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki: Interesy I Deologiia," *Nauchnye Vedomosti Belgorodskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta* 45, no. 2 (2018): 360–68, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/v/vneshnyaya-politika-donetskoy-narodnoy-respubliki-interesy-i-ideologiya.

[112] Ivan Katchanovski, "The Separatist War in Donbas: A Violent Break-up of Ukraine?," *European Politics and Society* 17, no. 4 (2016): 473–89, https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2016.1154131.

[113] M Suslov, "The Production of 'Novorossiya': A Territorial Brand in Public Debates," *Europe - Asia Studies* 69, no. 2 (2017): 202–21, https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2017.1285009.

[114] Marlene Laruelle, "The Three Colors of Novorossiya, or the Russian Nationalist Mythmaking of the Ukrainian Crisis," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32, no. 1 (2016): 55–74, https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2015.1023004.

[115] Kimitaka Matsuzato, "The Donbass War: Outbreak and Deadlock," *Demokratizatsiya* 25, no. 2 (2017): 175–201.

[116] John O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal, and Vladimir Kolosov, "The Rise and Fall of 'Novorossiya': Examining Support for a Separatist Geopolitical Imaginary in Southeast Ukraine," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 33, no. 2 (2017): 124–44, https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2016.1146452.

The works mentioned above look at Donbas and the ongoing conflict from the perspective of historical developments, domestic and international politics, language, ethnicity or (national) identity. A second set of works examines Donbas and the conflict through the lens of media discourses and narratives. One point of focus has been to assess how the conflict has been framed by international media, including the United States[117], Russia[118] (particularly with regards to what is often called "information warfare"; see for example Kurban[119], Mudra[120] and Medovkina[121]), Italy[122] and Poland[123]. The Donbas conflict is also used as a case study to analyse features of the modern media environment, such as the "tabloidisation" of traditional media as a way to attract audiences[124], or the "euphemisation" of news events and the words associated with them[125].

Other work has focused more on social media, which have played an outsized role as a source of information about the conflict for citizens as well as journalists[126]. Andrei Tarnavskii and Ol'ga Filatova examine discourses produced by people posting on Russian social media in early 2015, e.g. "the people" versus "Vladimir Putin" or "peaceful citizens of Donbas" versus "the Ukrainian authorities"[127]. Radomir Bolgov and colleagues examine political discourses about the Donbas conflict in social media posts on Facebook, Vkontakte, Instagram and Twitter by institutional actors (e.g. government officials) and "political individuals"[128]. They identify key conceptual metaphors (positive and negative assessments about the DNR and LNR) as well as

[117] Yevgeniia R Mikhailova, "Sravnitel'nyi Analiz Osveshcheniia Rosiiskimi I Amerikanskimi SMI Krizisa v Donbase," *Alleia Nauki* 11 (2017), https://alley-science.ru/domains_data/files/July7/THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE RUSSIAN AND AMERICAN PRESS COVERAGE OF THE DONBAS CRISIS.pdf.; O Vysots'kyi and A. P. Luk'ianenko, "Obraz Ukraïny v Dzerkali Amerikans'kykh Media: Osoblyvosti Pozytyvnoho Ta Nehatyvnoho Pozitsionuvannia," *Politychni Nauky* 110 (2016): 364–69.

[118] Mikhailova, "Sravnitel'nyi Analiz Osveshcheniia Rosiiskimi I Amerikanskimi SMI Krizisa v Donbase."

[119] Oleksandr V Kurban, "Informatsiine Suprovodzhennia Rosiiskoï Hibrydnoï Ahresiï v Donbasi (2014-2016)," *Bibliotekoznavstvo. Dokumentoznavstvo. Informolohiia*, no. 2 (2017): 66–73.

[120] Iryna Mudra, "Poniattia 'Feik' ta Ioho Vydy U ZMI," *Tele- Ta Radiozhurnalistyka*, no. 15 (2016): 184–88.

[121] L Yu Medovkina, "Vliianie Sredstv Massovoi Informatsii Na Provedenie Vooruzhennykh Konfliktov," *Nauchnye Vedomosti Belgorodskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta* 22, no. 243 (2016): 189–92, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/v/vliyanie-sredstv-massovoy-informatsii-na-provedenie-vooruzhennyh-konfliktov.

[122] Sergii Pakhomenko and G V Rudnits'ka, "Konflikt Na Donbasi U Dzerkali Italiis'kykh Media," *Visnyk Mariupol'sk'koho Derzhavnoho Universiytetu* 15 (2016): 276–87.

[123] Uliana Pereskop'ska, "Obraz Okupovanoï Skhidnoï Ukraïny U Pol'skykh Media," *Kyïvs'ki Polonistychni Studiï* 28 (2016): 244–49.

[124] Oksana Pochapskaia, "Ideologiia Tabloidizatsii: Provokatsiia Kak Metod Privlecheniia Auditorii v Sovremennykh SMI," Belarus State University Library, 2016, http://elib.bsu.by/bitstream/123456789/148492/1/Pochapskaja.PDF.

[125] O V Taranenko, "Evfemizatsiia v Ukraïns'komu Media-Dyskursi Periodu Hibrydnoï Viiny," *Sotsial'ni Komunikatsiï: Teoriia I Praktika* 4 (2017): 19–27, https://comteka.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/TOM_4.pdf#page=19.

[126] Iryna Rievunova, "Sotsial'ni Merezhi Iak Dzherelo Novyn Dlia Onlain-Medii Pid Chas Vysvitlennia Antyterorystychnoï Operatsiï Na Donbasi," *Visnyk L'vivskoho Universiytetu*, no. 35 (2014): 259–64.

[127] Tarnavskii and Filatova, "Analiz Publichnogo Diskursa v Rossiiskikh Sotsial'nykh Setiakh Vokrug Konflikta v Donbasse."

[128] Radomir Bolgov, O G Filatova, and A A Tarnavskii, "Analysis of Public Discourse about Donbas Conflict in Russian Social Media," in *Proceedings of the ICCWS 2016 11th International Conference on Cyber Warfare and Security*, 2016, 37–46.

semantic oppositions such as "us" versus "them". Aleksei Tokarev explores discourses produced by Ukrainian "elites" on Facebook about the relations with the population of Donbas[129]. Mykola Mykhortykh and Maryna Sidorova look at the use of social media for the visual framing of the Donbas conflict and conclude that social media allowed for an environment that "facilitated the propagation of mutually exclusive views on the conflict and led to the formation of divergent expectations in Ukraine and Russia concerning the outcome of the war in Donbas"[130].

Local media in Donbas, inside as well as outside of the territories currently under occupation, have received some scholarly attention[131]. Sergei Buntovskii[132] presents a discourse analysis of politically oriented newspapers printed in Donbas between 1991 and 2014, and concludes that many of these papers frame topics mostly from a Russophile perspective. Halyna Kutniakova looks at local media in Mariupol (which was under DNR occupation for a period in 2014), focusing on problematic "ethno-nationalist" content produced by various ethnic groups in the city[133]. Media content produced inside the territories under DNR and LNR control has been analysed by a few scholars, but overall it has received relatively little attention. Svetlana Fiialka conducted a qualitative content analysis of approximately 5.800 articles published on pro-DNR/LNR news sites such as *Russkaia Vesna*, *NovoRosInform*, *AntiFashist*, and *DNR-News*, identifying a set of common narratives present on these sites, such as a celebration of Russian or separatist feats and exploits, criticism of the USA, and a "hyperbolisation" of economic, political societal and other problems present in Ukraine[134]. Kateryna Boyko's master thesis compares the content of the weekly newspaper *Novorossiia*, published by the DNR authorities, with the ISIS propaganda glossy *Dabiq*[135]. She concludes that the DNR authorities push a rather confused (or

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[129] Aleksei A Tokarev, "Diskurs Ukrainskikh Elit v Otnoshenii Territorii I Naseleniia Donbassa 2009-2018 Gg.: Analiz Natsional'nogo Segmenta Facebook," *Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta* 6, no. 63 (2018): 194–211, https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2018-6-63-194-211.

[130] Mykola Makhortykh and Maryna Sydorova, "Social Media and Visual Framing of the Conflict in Eastern Ukraine," *Media, War & Conflict* 10, no. 3 (2017): 359–81, https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635217702539.

[131] Scholarly work covering local media in Donbas before 1991 is exceedingly rare and does not connect media discourse to Donbas identity. Only Elena Aliieva gives a succinct, factual overview of printed newspapers in Donbas during the peak years of the New Economic Policy, 1923 and 1924. See: E Aliieva, "Drukovani Zasoby Masovoï Informatsiï Donbasu v 1923-1924 Rr.," *Skhid* 3, no. 117 (2012): 78–81.

[132] Buntovskii, "Politicheski Orientirovannye Pechatnye SMI Donbassa Ot Raspada SSSR Do Provozglasheniia DNR."

[133] Halyna I Kutniakova, "Etnonatsional'na Problematika U Kontenti Mariupol'sk'kykh Media," in *Zbirnyk Materialiv XIX Pidsumskovoï Naukovo-Praktichnoï Konferentsiï Vykladachiv*, ed. K B Balabanova (Mariupol', 2017), 227–28, http://91.250.23.215:8080/jspui/bitstream/123456789/112/4/Aktualni_problemy_XIX_2017.pdf#page=227.

[134] Svetlana B Fiialka, "Novyny Separatistsk'kykh Internet-Media v Informatsiinii Viini Proti Ukraïny," *Sotsial'ni Komunikatsiï: Teoriia I Praktika* 1, no. 55 (2017): 73–87.

[135] Kateryna Boyko, "Mediating Alternative Statehood: A Case Study of Dabiq and Novorossiya Publications" (Södertörn University, 2016).

"hesitant", in her words) set of narratives about the future of the DNR. Boyko argues that there is a certain level of uncertainty in the content published in *Novorossiia* about whether to stay within Ukraine as an autonomous entity, to join Russia, or to continue to strive for independence, as well as a lack of a coherent set of ideological motivations.

To summarise the above: while some work on the matter has been published, particularly in Russian and Ukrainian academic journals, the ongoing conflict remains highly understudied relative to its large geopolitical, cultural and academic significance. Nonetheless, within the community of scholars who study Donbas, there is a sizeable disagreement about such central issues as the root causes of the emergence of the DNR and LNR and the role of mythmaking and identity construction. Broadly speaking, debates arise as to the role that the Russian Federation is playing in the emergence and continued existence of the DNR and LNR, to what extent separatism carries popular support at the local level, and whether or not the DNR and LNR are considered to be manifestations of long-abiding historical sentiments in the region.

With regards to studies that look at the role of media in the Donbas conflict, the vast majority of published works have focused on media discourses that originate outside of the occupied territories. Little attention has been paid so far to the narratives and discourses produced within the DNR and LNR. It is here that we find a gap in existing knowledge not only about the DNR and LNR, but about the conflict and identity in Donbas more broadly.

0.5 Methodology

In order to analyse media discourse in wartime Donbas with both breadth and depth, I draw on a variety of data sets, including legal documents, primary source material such as press conferences, official statements, email correspondence and interviews, as well as numerous corpora of news articles published in newspapers and news sites in Donbas. The sheer amount of this material, most of which was published in written form, requires an innovative methodology that couples computer-assisted topic modelling with close reading. Due to its novelty in the social sciences and humanities, I explain my approach in some detail here.

Content analysis is a staple method in sociology, psychology, media studies and history, used to extract meaning from a corpus of text, images, sound or video. A commonly used approach to tackling this problem is to infer categories with increasing levels of abstraction. Words and phrases are condensed into meaningful units. These units are categorised into codes, or labels, that describe what the condensed unit of meaning is about. Codes are then grouped together into categories by their content or their context. Categories are linked together into themes, comprised of two or more categories with a latent underlying meaning. And finally, themes comprise narratives, or the "stories" that are told through these themes[136].

Prior to the advent of the information age, this process was necessarily done manually. Researchers would sift through and categorise large volumes of data. Since the early 2000s, computer scientists have sought ways to automate this process for purposes of convenience, replicability and scale. This field of research, broadly defined, carries the name "natural language processing" (NLP). By seeking to eliminate the unconscious (and sometimes conscious) biases of researchers, and in allowing for much larger volumes of data to be analysed, automated content analysis methodologies have brought about important contributions to the social sciences[137].

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[136] Christen Erlingsson and Petra Brysiewicz, "A Hands-on Guide to Doing Content Analysis," *African Journal of Emergency Medicine* 7, no. 3 (2017): 93–99, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.afjem.2017.08.001.; Eric T. Meyer, "What Is Content Analysis?," Oxford Microsites, 2017, http://microsites.oii.ox.ac.uk/tidsr/kb/54/what-content-analysis.; Karen E Dill and Michael R Neal, "Media Content Analysis: Qualitative Methods" (Oxford, 2012), http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195398809.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195398809-e-29.

[137] David M Blei, Andrew Y Ng, and Michael I Jordan, "Latent Dirichlet Allocation," *Journal of Machine Learning Research* 3, no. Jan (2003): 993–1022.; Derek Greene and James P Cross, "Exploring the Political Agenda of the European Parliament Using a Dynamic Topic Modeling Approach," *CoRR* abs/1607.0 (2016), http://arxiv.org/abs/1607.03055.; Stephan A Curiskis et al., "An Evaluation of Document Clustering and Topic Modelling in Two Online Social Networks: Twitter and Reddit," *Information Processing & Management*, 2019, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2019.04.002.

0.5.1 Topic modelling

One of the most successful of these contributions is topic modelling. A topic modelling algorithm turns a corpus of text into a series of vectors (or a set of coordinates), in which each word is assigned a unique space in a multi-dimensional vector matrix. By iteratively calculating the proximity of each vector (or word) to every other vector in the corpus, a topic model can determine the semantic closeness between two words within a topic. Depending on the number of topics that the researcher asks the algorithm to extract, the model then puts out a series of topics in the form of lists of words ranked by their probability of occurring in that topic[138]. To do so, the model requires as input a corpus of text, for example in the form of news articles, social media posts or film reviews. The result is a set of topics, each made up of a list of semantically related words such as "goal", "corner", "ball" and "pass". The names of the topics (e.g. "football", "politics" or "dancing") are then assigned manually. Topic models have been used in a wide range of social science research, for example to look at conspiracy theories on Reddit[139], themes and motifs in Spanish poetry[140] and news articles about thirdhand smoke pollutants in China[141].

More recently, researchers have begun to explore the possibility of using topic modelling to trace the evolution of topics in a corpus over time. This led to the development of so-called dynamic topic models[142]. In a dynamic topic model, each document is given a time stamp (usually weeks, months or years). The model assumes that a set of topics with time stamp 2 has evolved from the set of topics with time stamp 1, and so on. Thus, while the topics are extracted from the full corpus, the ranked list of words that make up the topics evolves with each time stamp.

A strong advantage of topic modelling is its agnosticism, which is of particular importance to this study of a highly politicised and contested media landscape. The researcher does not give the model any input in advance about what topics it will

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[138] Blei, Ng, and Jordan, "Latent Dirichlet Allocation," 2003.

[139] Colin Klein, Peter Clutton, and Vince Polito, "Topic Modeling Reveals Distinct Interests within an Online Conspiracy Forum," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (February 21, 2018): 189, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00189.

[140] Borja Navarro-Colorado, "On Poetic Topic Modeling: Extracting Themes and Motifs From a Corpus of Spanish Poetry," *Frontiers in Digital Humanities* 5 (2018): 15, https://doi.org/10.3389/fdigh.2018.00015.

[141] Qian Liu et al., "Data Analysis and Visualization of Newspaper Articles on Thirdhand Smoke: A Topic Modeling Approach," *JMIR Medical Informatics* 7, no. 1 (January 29, 2019): e12414–e12414, https://doi.org/10.2196/12414.

[142] Greene and Cross, "Exploring the Political Agenda of the European Parliament Using a Dynamic Topic Modeling Approach."; David M Blei and John D Lafferty, "Dynamic Topic Models," in *Proceedings of the 23rd International Conference on Machine Learning*, ICML '06 (New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2006), 113–20, https://doi.org/10.1145/1143844.1143859.

generate. The model can thus be seen as a fair representation of the topics of discussion present in the text corpus. If 80% of all topics in the model relate to sports, then sports is a highly dominant topic of discussion across the corpus. Because it is unknown what kinds of topic will emerge prior to starting the analysis, the topic model gives insight not only into what specific topics are discussed, but also in what proportion. This lowers the risk of selection bias. In total, this dissertation's data set consists of tens of thousands of news articles. It would be relatively easy to engage wittingly or unwittingly in cherry-picking and find quotes that are convenient to the argument at hand. The topic modelling method makes selective citation less problematic.

0.5.1.1 Which topic modelling method?

There are various ways to construct a topic model. The most well-known and well-established methods are Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), Latent Semantic Analysis with singular value decomposition (LSA) and Non-Negative Matrix Factorisation (NMF). Their differences can be found in the way that they determine the semantic closeness of words in documents; this can be done statistically (as is the case with LDA) or algebraically (as with LSA and NMF).

The utility and preferability of method depends on the type of corpus. Factors such as the average length of each document (whether the corpus consists of Twitter posts or Wikipedia entries, for example) and the corpus language (different languages have different syntactic structures) can make a significant difference to the accuracy and interpretability of the model[143].

The vast majority of this dissertation's corpus of news articles was written in Russian, and a small minority in English. There are few examples of topic models being applied to Russian corpora, although some work has been done on topic modelling Russian

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[143] Wayne Xin Zhao et al., "Comparing Twitter and Traditional Media Using Topic Models," in *European Conference on Information Retrieval* (Springer, 2011), 338–49.

works of literature[144], blog posts[145], Twitter posts[146] and other types of short texts[147]. A large-scale analysis of Russian-language news articles, as in this dissertation, has not yet been conducted. It is therefore not immediately clear what topic modelling method is a proven best fit for the purpose of this dissertation. A trial was therefore conducted, applying LDA, LSA and NMF to the same corpus (the Luhansk-based newspaper *Kozachii Vestnik*, see chapter 4) and using the same parameters, in order to see which method produces the most coherent results in terms of their interpretability and coherence. The full results can be found in the supplement to this dissertation[148]. The NMF analysis produced the best results, as can be seen in the example below. It shows the top 10 words under the topic "children" for each method (translated to English with the transliteration between brackets):

NMF: school (shkol-), children (det-), area (raion), children's (detsk-), garden (sad), Krasnodonsk, Lutuginsk, textbook (uchebn-), parent (roditel-), class (klass-)

LDA: school (shkhol-), area (raion), aid (pomoshch-), education (obrazovan-), humanitarian (gumanitarn-), children's (detsk-), family (sem-), Krasnodonsk, Krasnodon, housefire (pozhar)

LSA: school (shkol-), coal mine (shakht-), children (det-), area (raion), children's (detsk-), tonne (ton-), goal (ugl-), Donbas, DNR, Sverdlovsk

The NMF method produces coherent results, with all words in the topic being directly related to children and education (apart from two place names). The LDA topic, however, also contains words that are unrelated such as "aid" (pomoshch'), "humanitarian" (gumanitarnyi) and "housefire" (pozhar). LSA is even less coherent, associating terms related to children and education with words such as "coal mine" (shakhta), "coal" (ugol') and "tonne" (tonna). The spreadsheet of this exploratory analysis also shows that the LDA and LDA models repeat the same terms more often across topics than NMF, leading to less variability and thus a less readily interpretable

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[144] Anastasiia Sedova and Olga Mitrofanova, "Topic Modelling in Parallel and Comparable Fiction Texts (the Case Study of English and Russian Prose)," in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Internet and Modern Society*, 2017, 175–80, https://doi.org/9781450354370.; Olga Mitrofanova, "Probabilistic Topic Modeling of the Russian Text Corpus on Musicology," in *Language, Music, and Computing, Vol. 561*, ed. P Eismont and N Konstantinova (Springer, Cham, 2015), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-27498-0_6.

[145] Sergey I Nikolenko, Sergei Koltcov, and Olessia Koltsova, "Topic Modelling for Qualitative Studies," *Journal of Information Science* 43, no. 1 (December 11, 2015): 88–102, https://doi.org/10.1177/0165551515617393.

[146] Cascadia Analytics, "Topic Modeling and Visualization of Russian IRA Tweets," *Www.cascadia-Analytics.com*, August 12, 2018, https://www.cascadia-analytics.com/2018/08/12/ira-tweets1.html.

[147] Vivek Kumar Rangarajan Sdridhar, "Unsupervised Topic Modeling for Short Texts Using Distributed Representations of Words," in *Proceedings of NAACL-HLT*, 2015, 192–200, https://www.aclweb.org/anthology/W15-1526.

[148] This file is found in the supplement, file M.1. The Python script that was used to run the LDA and LSA analyses can be found in file M.3.

model. The choice was therefore made to use the NMF topic modelling method for the news corpora analysed in this dissertation[149].

0.5.1.2 Non-negative Matrix Factorisation

To clarify what NMF does, this section will explain its basic principles without delving too deeply into the mathematical details. In essence, non-negative matrix factorisation is an algebraic way of dividing a matrix into two smaller matrices, the product of which approximates the original matrix. The advantage of this approach is that the two smaller matrices are made up of fewer elements than the original, so that the latter is reduced to fewer components. "Non-negative" simply means that none of the numbers in any of the matrices are below 0; this makes sense since the values in the matrices represent words and documents, and negative values are of little use in this regard. Matrix factorisation is visualised in the figure below.
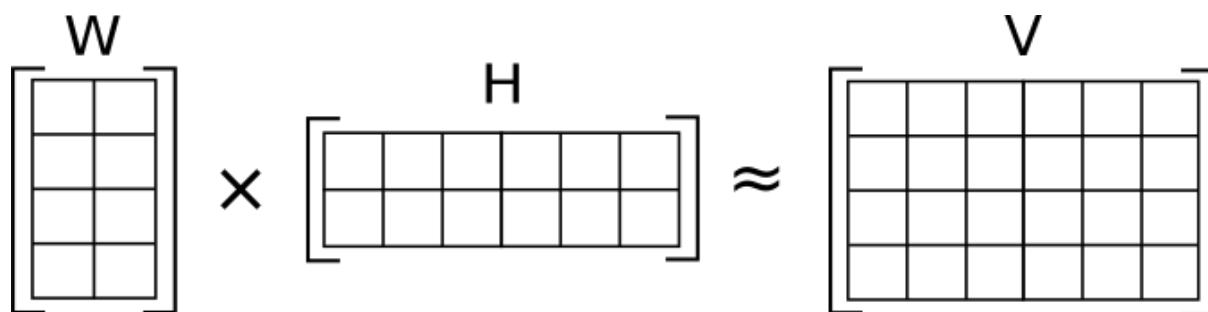
Figure 2: Matrix factorisation[150]

Matrices have two dimensions (columns and rows). For our topic model of a set of written documents, let us assume that in the matrix **V** in the figure represents the full text corpus. In matrix **V**, rows (horizontal) list the documents in the corpus, and the columns (vertical) list the words that these documents contain. Or, in other words, **V** is a matrix with dimensions m and n, where m is the total number of documents in the corpus and n is the total number of words.

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[149] The Python script that was used to run the NMF model can be found in the supplement to this dissertation (file M.4).
[150] Wikipedia, "Non-Negative Matrix Factorization," www.wikipedia.org, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-negative_matrix_factorization.

V

	W1	W2	W3	W4	Wn
D1	0	1	0	3	2
D2	1	0	3	0	1
Dn	2	1	0	1	2

Figure 3: A document-word matrix

In figure 3, word 1 (W1) appears in document 1 (D1) zero times, word 2 (W2) appears in D1 once, and so on. What NMF does is construct two matrices from matrix **V**, **W** and **H**, where **W** is a document-topics matrix and **H** is a topic-words matrix. In other words: **W** is a matrix with dimensions *m* and *k*, and **H** is a matrix with dimensions *k* and *n*, where *k* stands for the number of topics and *m* and *n* stand for the total number of documents and the total number of words, respectively. Multiplying **W** by **H** returns an approximation of the original matrix **V** (see figure 2). The NMF algorithm finds **W** and **H** through an iterative process that aims to solve an optimisation problem by using various ways of measuring distances between multidimensional mathematical objects like matrices or probability distributions[151].

To summarise, NMF algorithms can optimise matrices **W** and **H** by assigning a probability to each document belonging to a topic for matrix **W**, and to each word belonging in a topic for matrix **H**. One can then tell the algorithm to list, for example, the 10 words that have the highest probability of belonging to topic *k*=1, and so on[152]. This results in a topic table, with each term ranked according to declining probability of appearing in the topic.

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[151] Roger A Horn and Charles R Johnson, *Matrix Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).; James M Joyce, "Kullback-Leibler Divergence," in *International Encyclopedia of Statistical Science*, ed. Miodrag Lovric (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2011), 720–22, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-04898-2_327.; Solomon Kullback and Richard A Leibler, "On Information and Sufficiency," *The Annals of Mathematical Statistics* 22, no. 1 (1951): 79–86, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2236703.; Gene H Golub and Charles F Van Loan, *Matrix Computations*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1996).
[152] Derek Greene, "Dynamic-Nmf: Dynamic Topic Modelling," www.github.com, 2016, https://github.com/derekgreene/dynamic-nmf.

0.5.1.3 How many topics?

Topic models are not inherently capable of deciding how many topics they should extract from the corpus; this is usually decided by the analyst, although recently advances have been made in automatic topic number detection[153]. Deciding on the number of topics is an important question, as choosing too few results in overly broad topics, and choosing too many will make the topics incoherent or highly similar[154]. Different methods have been developed to solve this question without using trial and error, many of which initially relied on statistical clustering methods[155].

However, topic interpretation is, in the end, a human activity. This means that the optimal number of topics that a statistical method arrives at may not be seen as such by human interpreters. For example, a measure called perplexity (or held-out likelihood; how well a probability distribution predicts a sample), which has been used regularly to evaluate topic model quality, was found to correlate negatively with how good humans judged the topic model to be[156]. This prompted the development of so-called "coherence measures", which alongside statistical evaluation also take into account the semantic interpretability of topics[157].

There is a variety of coherence measures available, from normalised pointwise mutual information (TC-NPMI)[158] to pairwise log conditional probability[159] and Word2Vec (TC-W2V)[160]. In this dissertation, I will make use of the TC-W2V coherence measure, for several reasons: 1) it has been successfully used in previous academic research, 2) it

[153] Martin Gerlach, Tiago P Peixoto, and Eduardo G Altmann, "A Network Approach to Topic Models," *Science Advances* 4, no. 7 (July 1, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aaq1360.

[154] Derek Greene, Derek O'Callaghan, and Pádraig Cunningham, "How Many Topics? Stability Analysis for Topic Models," in *Joint European Conference on Machine Learning and Knowledge Discovery in Databases* (Springer, 2014), 498–513.

[155] R Arun et al., "On Finding the Natural Number of Topics with Latent Dirichlet Allocation: Some Observations," in *Advances in Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining*, ed. Mohammed J Zaki et al. (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2010), 391–402.

[156] Jonathan Chang et al., "Reading Tea Leaves: How Humans Interpret Topic Models," in *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems 22*, ed. Y Bengio et al. (Curran Associates, Inc., 2009), 288–96, http://papers.nips.cc/paper/3700-reading-tea-leaves-how-humans-interpret-topic-models.pdf.

[157] Derek O'Callaghan et al., "An Analysis of the Coherence of Descriptors in Topic Modeling," *Expert Systems with Applications* 42, no. 13 (2015): 5645–57, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eswa.2015.02.055.

[158] Jey Han Lau, David Newman, and Timothy Baldwin, "Machine Reading Tea Leaves: Automatically Evaluating Topic Coherence and Topic Model Quality," in *Proceedings of the 14th Conference of the European Chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics* (Association for Computational Linguistics, 2014), 530–39, https://www.aclweb.org/anthology/E14-1056.; Natalia Loukachevitch, Michael Nokel, and Kirill Ivanov, "Combining Thesaurus Knowledge and Probabilistic Topic Models," in *BT - Analysis of Images, Social Networks and Texts*, ed. Wil M P van der Aalst et al. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 59–71.

[159] D Mimno et al., "Optimizing Semantic Coherence in Topic Models," in *EMNLP 2011 - Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing, Proceedings of the Conference*, 2011, 262–72, https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-80053260943&partnerID=40&md5=298df14b75b2a3d4a73c1746f652db0b.

[160] O'Callaghan et al., "An Analysis of the Coherence of Descriptors in Topic Modeling."

outperforms other topic coherence measures, 3) it can be used for both dynamic and static topic models, and 4) it is versatile enough to be effective for various types of corpora, including different types of news articles[161].

The TC-W2V measure relies on the use of a word embedding model (a Word2Vec- or W2V-model) that calculates if two given words from the corpus have similar "contexts": if the same words are likely to appear near two different words, these words are said to have highly similar contexts. The Word2Vec-algorithm contains a "window size" parameter that determines how many words around any given word the algorithm takes into account. The default for this is 5, meaning that the algorithm considers the 5 words before and after a word as part of the word's "context". The algorithm represents each word in the corpus as a one-hot[162] vector with as many components (or bits) as there are unique words in the corpus. It then predicts the context probability for each unique word vis-à-vis each other word (called Skip-gram), as well as the word probability based on its context (called a Continuous Bag of Words; CBOW)[163].

The topic coherence for *n* number of topics is then calculated by first pairing each word in the W2V-model with each corresponding word in the NMF-model. Then, the similarity between the two words in the pair (or, to be more precise, the similarity between the vectors corresponding to both words) is calculated. Next, the mean pair score per topic is determined. And finally, one can measure the mean coherence score across all topics by dividing the overall coherence score by the number of topics selected. The final result is a topic coherence score between 0 and 1. The higher the score, the more coherent the topic model[164]. This method is applied to a range of values for the preferred number of topics (for example between 4 and 20), and the number with the highest score is selected[165]. The same can be done for dynamic topic models. Derek Greene's dynamic NMF implementation contains a built-in measure that applies the TC-W2V measure to dynamic topics, thus making it possible to determine how many topics should be analysed over time[166].

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[161] Ibid.
[162] A one-hot vector is a vector or group of bits in which there is only one 'high' value allowed while all others must be 'low', e.g. 00000100 or 01000000.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Chris McCormick, "Word2Vec Tutorial - The Skip-Gram Model," www.mccormickml.com, 2016, http://mccormickml.com/2016/04/19/word2vec-tutorial-the-skip-gram-model/.
[165] Derek Greene, "Parameter Selection for NMF," www.github.com, 2017, https://github.com/derekgreene/topic-model-tutorial/blob/master/3 - Parameter Selection for NMF.ipynb.
[166] Greene, "Dynamic-Nmf: Dynamic Topic Modelling."

There are no hard rules on what constitutes an acceptable cut-off for the TC-W2V score. However, O'Callaghan and colleagues report a relatively stable mean TC-W2V score of around 0.40 for 6 different corpora of news articles[167]. In order to stay on the safe side of interpretability, I will therefore use this lower limit of .40 for all corpora in this dissertation. The topic coherence values are reported in the "statistics" tab of the spreadsheets in the supplement containing the topic model tables[168].

0.5.2 Term frequency-inverse document frequency

Chapter 3 of this dissertation makes use of dynamic topic modelling to analyse two corpora of local newspapers. Due to the relatively small number of documents, however, one corpus (*Tekhnopolis*) produced inconclusive results, offering little in the way of meaningful relations between words in the corpus to form topics. As a consequence, it was decided to focus on the evolution of the use of individual words instead.

Determining how important a word is in a text corpus is one of the earliest questions that was asked once computational language processing became available[169]. An intuitive approach would be to count the number of times a given term appears in each time stamp, and then draw a graph of occurrences over time. This is commonly called the "term frequency"[170]. However, this would not be a very good indicator of a term's relevance, as the documents in one time stamp might be longer or shorter on average than in another, meaning that it is possible for a term to appear more times in absolute terms, but be less relevant in relative terms. Therefore, it is useful to also implement a statistic that lowers the weight of terms that appear frequently across many documents in the corpus, and raises the weight of terms that appear in few documents. This statistic is called the "inverse document frequency"[171].

Multiplying the term frequency with its inverse document frequency then gives the "Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency" (Tf-Idf) statistic. Tf-Idf normalises the

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[167] O'Callaghan et al., "An Analysis of the Coherence of Descriptors in Topic Modeling."

[168] These files can be found in the supplement (files 3.2, 3.3, 4.2, 4.4 through 4.8, and 5.2 through 5.5).

[169] Hans Peter Luhn, "A Statistical Approach to Mechanized Encoding and Searching of Literary Information," *IBM Journal of Research and Development* 1, no. 4 (October 1957): 309–17, https://doi.org/10.1147/rd.14.0309.

[170] Ibid.

[171] Karen Spärck Jones, "A Statistical Interpretation of Term Specificity and Its Application in Retrieval," *Journal of Documentation* 28 (1972): 11–21.

term's weight in a relatively simple manner, and is commonly used to assess how important a word is to a given document in a given corpus. Thus, calculating the Tf-Idf of the terms in each time stamp in the corpus allows one to trace the relevance of this term across time stamps[172]. In chapter 3, this is done for the top 50 terms in each time period[173].

0.5.3 Qualitative analysis

Topic modelling methods and the Tf-Idf statistic are capable of extracting clusters of semantically related words and tracing the development of both terms and topics over time. A topic in a topic model is analogous to a category (as described above), as it is the result of a statistical or algebraic grouping process of words with underlying semantic similarities. After this point, however, the process of structuring topics (or categories) into themes is not (or not yet) within the grasp of natural language processing methods. This part of content analysis remains largely qualitative. In this dissertation, I will therefore only rely on (dynamic) topic modelling and the Tf-Idf method to infer categories. The process of distilling these categories into themes and narratives is done qualitatively[174], following the steps set out by Erlingsson and Brysiewycz[175]. This is particularly relevant in chapters 4 and 5, which both rely on this methodology. The figure below displays this process schematically.

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[172] The Python script for conducting the Tf-Idf analysis can be found in the supplement to this dissertation (file M.5).

[173] This is to some extent an arbitrary cut-off. The choice of calculating only the top 50 Tf-Idf scores was made because the Tf-Idf scores per time stamp taper off rapidly after 50 and approach 0.

[174] Florian Kohlbacher, "The Use of Qualitative Content Analysis in Case Study Research," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 7, no. 1 (2006), https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-7.1.75.

[175] Erlingsson and Brysiewicz, "A Hands-on Guide to Doing Content Analysis."
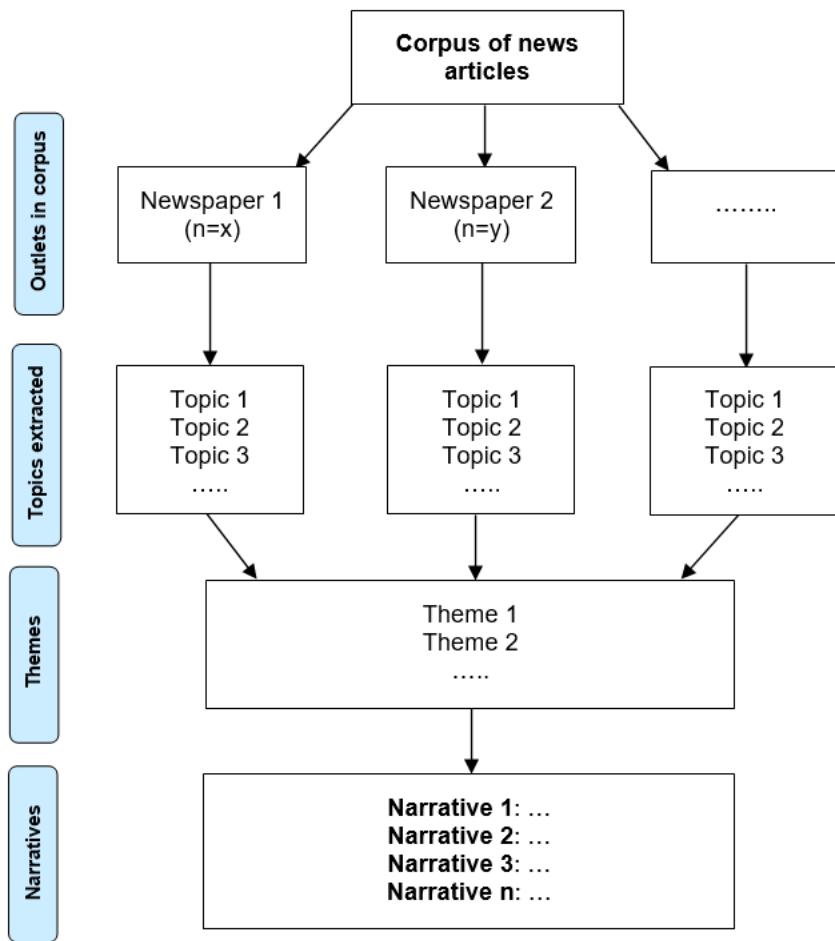
Figure 4: Content analysis flow chart

Figure 4 shows the process by which one arrives at a narrative from a corpus of documents. This process is half-automated and half-manual. The process of developing themes from topics is done by grouping together topics with similar content. For example, topics relating to chess, football and boxing can be categorised into the theme "sports"; and topics like "artillery shellings", "the Minsk agreements" and "war crimes" can be grouped together into the theme of "the Donbas conflict". The next step involves going from a set of themes to a (smaller) set of narratives. This process necessitates not only grouping together various themes that are interrelated (e.g. the themes "Donbas conflict" and "World War II" both give shape to the narrative "the memory of World War II", as in chapter 4), but also a more granular, close-reading analysis of individual articles in the corpus that give shape to the narrative itself. Throughout this dissertation, relevant articles will be cited, and indicative quotations will be highlighted, in order to illustrate and substantiate my arguments.

0.5.4 Data collection and preparation

The news corpora analysed in this dissertation were obtained using the Google Webscraper tool[176]. In order to maximise the corpus size, as many articles as possible were obtained between the earliest available date (varying between early 2012 and late 2016) and December 31, 2017. To ensure that the data was available for use, each website's robots.txt file was checked to see if article scraping was permitted[177], as well as the terms and conditions[178]. Some websites from which the corpora were obtained contained a provision in the terms and conditions allowing for the publication and citation of articles on the site only when a hyperlink to the article is provided. The hyperlinks to all articles in the corpus can all be found in the spreadsheets accompanying each chapter in the supplement to this dissertation.

The corpora were collected as Comma Separated Files and include each article's unique identifier, date, title, content, author (where available) and number of views (where available). After the data was obtained, each corpus underwent several cleaning procedures. First, all articles that only contained a title and no content were removed. Duplicates were also removed using Excel's "remove duplicates" function. Next, articles with fewer than 30 words were removed from all corpora. The reason for this is that topic modelling is less effective when applied to short semantic structures such as Twitter posts or other short pieces of text[179]. Furthermore, topic models can only be used if the corpus is monolingual, as they are unable to identify words in different languages with identical meanings as belonging to the same category. While the vast majority of articles in each corpus were written in Russian, there were some occasional articles in Ukrainian, especially in the *Makeevskii Rabochii*-corpus (see chapter 4). Therefore, all Ukrainian-language articles were excluded from the topic modelling analysis (although they were preserved in the full corpus for purposes of qualitative analysis). Additionally, there are no hard guidelines on the minimum number of articles and/or words in a corpus when using topic modelling. Generally speaking, the rule is "the more the better". As a rule of thumb, corpora with less than

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[176] Martins Balodis, "Google Chrome Webscraper," www.chrome.google.com, 2018, https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/web-scraper/jnhgnonknehpejjnehehllkliplmbmhn?hl=en.
[177] Brendan Bailey, "Scraping the Internet's Most Popular Websites," www.towardsdatascience.com, 2017, https://towardsdatascience.com/scraping-the-internets-most-popular-websites-a4c6f0be382d.
[178] Screenshots of the *robots.txt* file (which indicates scraping permissions) of each website from which data was scraped can be obtained from the author upon request.
[179] Liangjie Hong and Brian D Davison, "Empirical Study of Topic Modeling in Twitter," in *Proceedings of the First Workshop on Social Media Analytics* (ACM, 2010), 80–88; Zhao et al., "Comparing Twitter and Traditional Media Using Topic Models."

150 articles and/or less than 35.000 words were excluded, loosely following recommendations by Nguyen and colleagues[180]. These smaller corpora, however, were included for purposes of qualitative analysis.

In order to make the articles in the corpora fit for quantitative analysis, the names of the article's author, punctuation, website links (e.g. constructions like "http", "www", ".ru", ".com.ua" et cetera), common stop words without much semantic importance (e.g. "the", "if" and their Russian-language equivalents), and fixed constructions (e.g. phrases like "for more information, see…" or "photo taken by…") were all removed, as all of this would significantly affect the model[181]. The words in the corpus were also stemmed so that the model would see identical words with different endings or conjugations (e.g. "walk" and "walks") as the same. This is the reason why the topic models contain parts of words as opposed to the whole word (e.g. "Ukrain" instead of "Ukraine").

0.5.5 Coding, parameters and data processing

NMF can be run for both static and dynamic topic models. Chapter 3 contains a dynamic topic model and makes use of the Tf-Idf measure. Chapters 4 and 5 in this dissertation rely on static as well as dynamic topic models. The code to run the static models (as well as the test models for LDA and LSA and the code to extract Tf-Idf features) were written in the programming language Python. Specifically, I have made use of standard, previously developed topic modelling implementations in the machine learning library *SciKit-Learn*[182]. The reason for following established routines is that this ensures their validity and usefulness for use in academic research[183]. To write the code I have drawn on the work of programmers who kindly made their code available on the online repository *GitHub*[184]. In addition, a cleaning script was developed to

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[180] Dat Quoc Nguyen et al., "Improving Topic Models with Latent Feature Word Representations," *Transactions of the Association for Computational Linguistics* 3 (2015): 299–313, https://transacl.org/ojs/index.php/tacl/article/view/582/158.
[181] Matt Pitchford, "Preparing Your Data for Topic Modelling," Scholarly Commons, 2017, https://publish.illinois.edu/commonsknowledge/2017/11/16/preparing-your-data-for-topic-modeling/.
[182] Fabian Pedregosa et al., "Scikit-Learn: Machine Learning in Python," *Journal of Machine Learning Research* 12, no. Oct (2011): 2825–30.
[183] Nikolenko, Koltcov, and Koltsova, "Topic Modelling for Qualitative Studies."
[184] Soura V Singh, "Topic Extraction with Non-Negative Matrix Factorization and Latent Dirichlet Allocation," www.github.com, 2019, https://github.com/scikit-learn/scikit-learn/blob/master/examples/applications/plot_topics_extraction_with_nmf_lda.py.; NLP for Hackers, "Complete Guide to Topic Modelling," www.nlpforhackers.io, 2018, https://nlpforhackers.io/topic-modeling/.; Greene, "Parameter Selection for NMF."; Thomas Buhrmann, "Analyzing Tf-Idf Results in Scikit-Learn," buhrmann.github.io, 2017, https://buhrmann.github.io/tfidf-analysis.html.

prepare the data (as described in the previous section): removing punctuation, stop words, capital letters, et cetera, in order to make the corpus ready for analysis[185].

Running a topic model involves altering certain parameters to optimise performance. The most important parameter is the number of topics, for which I have used the TC-W2V measure as described above. For all other necessary parameters I have followed guidelines set by other programmers in the source material[186], as well as recommended default settings on *www.scikit-learn.org[187]*. Table 1 below displays the parameters used (these same parameters can also be found in the scripts), along with a brief explanation[188].

Parameter	Value	Explanation
algorithm	randomized	SVD solver to use
alpha	0.1	a constant that multiplies the regularisation terms
components	16	the number of topics that is extracted
l1_ratio	0.5	the regularisation mixing parameter, between 0 and 1
learning_offset	50	a positive parameter that downweights early iterations in online learning for LDA
max_df	0.95	term frequency above which vocabulary terms are ignored
max_features	1000	how many terms are considered by the Tf-Idf vectorizer
max_iter	50	maximum number of iterations before timing out
min_df	2	cutoff rate below which vocabulary terms are ignored
n_iter	50	number of iterations for randomised SVD solver
random_state	none	whether the model uses a random seed as a starting point or not

Table 1: Parameters for static topic models

For the dynamic topic model in chapter 3, I have used Derek Greene's handy dynamic NMF implementation, available on *GitHub*, which also includes a function to determine the optimal number of dynamic topics using the WC-W2V measure. Greene and his colleagues have previously used this method to look at the development of topics in discussions in the European Parliament[189] as well as in a corpus of news articles[190]. This implementation could be run from terminal, and no additional coding or parameter setting was necessary, as the build could be run straight out of the box.

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[185] All of these scripts were written in Python. They can be found in the supplement (files M.2 through M.5), including relevant links to source material.
[186] Singh, "Topic Extraction with Non-Negative Matrix Factorization and Latent Dirichlet Allocation."; NLP for Hackers, "Complete Guide to Topic Modelling."
[187] Scikit Learn, "Non-Negative Matrix Factorization (NMF)," www.scikit-learn.org, 2007, https://scikit-learn.org/stable/modules/generated/sklearn.decomposition.NMF.html.
[188] With regards to the final parameter, 'random_state', multiple iterations of a dummy topic model were run to check if setting the random_state parameter to 'on' would produce noticeable differences in the model each time it was run. This was not the case: the observed differences with each iteration were minor.
[189] Greene and Cross, "Exploring the Political Agenda of the European Parliament Using a Dynamic Topic Modeling Approach."
[190] Greene, "Dynamic-Nmf: Dynamic Topic Modelling."

Finally, in order to ensure that the methods described above were used as intended, I consulted a number of engineers and computer scientists who used topic modelling in their work, and asked them to check the scripts I used for any errors. Their recommendations were taken into account when running the topic modelling analyses.

0.5.6 Summary

To summarise, this thesis makes use of a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Chapters 1 and 2 are exclusively qualitative and rely on primary and secondary source material such as legal documents, speeches, interviews, journalistic articles, opinion pieces and third-party accounts. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 rely on (dynamic) NMF, the Tf-Idf measure, as well as qualitative source interpretation and close reading, to categorise the various corpora and extract thematic patterns from a large volume of DNR and LNR newspaper and online articles. Specific details about each chapter's data set can be found under the "data set" section of each chapter.

0.6 Limitations

There are several limitations embedded in this dissertation, both conceptual and methodological. Conceptually, I do not draw extensive comparisons in terms of discourse and narrative construction, political and military developments, or the construction of legitimacy, between the DNR/LNR and Ukraine or Russia. There is a temptation to see the DNR and LNR as something of a halfway house between Ukraine and Russia in which Ukrainian citizens carry out Russian orders[191], or as the result of internal grievances within Ukraine[192], thus necessitating an analysis of where exactly the DNR and LNR depart from the Ukrainian state, legal framework and collective identity. More research is certainly necessary to shed light on such matters. In this dissertation, however, I look at identity discourse within DNR and LNR on its own merits. I treat the DNR and LNR not as "little Russia" or "little Ukraine" but as distinct entities being discursively generated and developed by their ruling authorities. By foregoing an extensive comparison to Ukrainian and Russian media, I am able to focus on internal DNR and LNR identity discourse in detail.

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[191] E.g. see: Bowen, "Coercive Diplomacy and the Donbas: Explaining Russian Strategy in Eastern Ukraine."
[192] E.g. see Kudelia, "The Donbas Rift."

Furthermore, this dissertation does not examine the effects of media discourse on popular opinion in Donbas. I will not look at whether the DNR and LNR authorities have been "effective" at convincing people (inside as well as outside of the territories under their control) of the legitimacy of the DNR and LNR projects. In part, this was a deliberate choice in order to narrow down the scope of this dissertation. But there are also significant difficulties in conducting reliable opinion polls on DNR and LNR territory, due to the ever-present risk of violence and the repressive ways in which the authorities have dealt with dissenting opinions. Recently, however, Gwendolyn Sasse and Alice Lackner conducted a large opinion survey in parts of Donbas controlled by the Ukrainian government and the DNR and LNR authorities, and concluded that around 55% of DNR/LNR inhabitants wished to remain part of Ukraine, while about 12% of them considered themselves "DNR/LNR residents". These numbers, they concluded, had remained stable between 2016 and 2019[193]. This gives some indication as to the effectiveness of DNR/LNR identity discourse.

A further conceptual problem has to do with terminology. Throughout this dissertation, I employ a variety of terms to describe the DNR and LNR authorities and the people fighting on their behalf on the ground, such as "insurgents", "armed groups", "protestors", and "demonstrators". While these terms do not by themselves possess a political charge, the problem with using such terms is that they imply a certain degree of autonomy. For example, the use of the term "protestors" implies that the demonstrations that occurred throughout Donbas in early 2014 were a genuine grassroots reaction to the events happening in Kyiv. While it is certainly true that there was a degree of discontent with the Euromaidan movement in Donbas at this time (chapters 1 and 3 discuss this matter in more detail), it is also the case that many demonstrations were organised or amplified by non-local Russian actors. Local citizens reported seeing buses crossing the border from Russia to eastern Ukraine with people that were joining the protests, and the various "People's Militias" that were organising some of the demonstrations were headed by Russian citizens[194]. Similarly, the presence of Russian military personnel (e.g. Igor Girkin/Strelkov) and weaponry, and their offensive use in the conflict, shows that the Donbas war should not be seen

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[193] Gwendolyn Sasse and Alice Lackner, "Attitudes and Identities across the Donbas Front Line: What Has Changed from 2016 to 2019?," 2019, https://www.zois-berlin.de/fileadmin/media/Dateien/ZOiS_Reports/ZOiS_Report_3_2019.pdf.
[194] Andrew Roth, "From Russia, 'Tourists' Stir the Protests," *The New York Times*, March 3, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/04/world/europe/russias-hand-can-be-seen-in-the-protests.html.

as an entirely organic "civil war"[195]. Russian, Ukrainian and international media, officials and others also use varied terminology to talk about the conflict. Within Ukraine, it is common to refer to the DNR and LNR as "terrorist" organisations that are "temporarily not currently under Ukrainian control". In Russia, it is more common to use phrases such as "uprising" or "insurgency". The choice of terminology is in many ways a political one. In order to be able to focus on the materials at hand, the terminology employed in this dissertation is as politically neutral as is reasonable, with additional commentary and context offered wherever appropriate.

Methodologically speaking, the most important limitation in this dissertation is its exclusive focus on written content and the absence of an analysis of visual or audio materials. Television, as is the case in many places, remains eastern Ukraine's most important form of media consumption[196]. In terms of absolute numbers, newspapers and news sites play a less significant role. Furthermore, identity construction does not occur exclusively (or even primarily) through written discourse, but also through visual semiotics such as flags, and aural and musical semiotics such as national anthems[197]. Due to limitations of length, this dissertation's methodology is unable to take this into account.

More specifically, the topic modelling and Tf-Idf methods used in this dissertation do not distinguish between articles that were published on a newspaper or website's front page or on page 14. These methods give equal weight to both, whereas an average reader of these materials would most likely not do so. It is therefore possible that some examples of identity discourse are identified as unimportant in this dissertation due to the low number of news articles that talk about them, whereas in reality they are regularly featured on the front page and thus much more prominent than expected. I consider this risk to be quite low, however, as it is reasonable to assume that important concepts are discussed with some regularity and in a variety of outlets.

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[195] Wilson, "The Donbas in 2014: Explaining Civil Conflict Perhaps, but Not Civil War."
[196] Internews, "Media Consumption Survey - UKRAINE 2016," 2016, https://www.internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/Media_Consumption_Survey_2016-09_Eng_Internews.pdf.
[197] Sarah Dellmann, *Images of Dutchness: Popular Visual Culture, Early Cinema and the Emergence of a National Cliché, 1800-1914* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9789462983007/images-of-dutchness.

With regards to the sample, as I discussed in the "data collection and preparation" section above, this dissertation is limited by the fact that the data was obtained through web scraping. Not all newspapers and news sites make their archives available online, and some websites put limitations in place for data scraping. The newspaper and website corpora used in this dissertation are thus determined by their availability as well as the possibility of collecting them in an ethical manner. It could be argued that this limitation could affect the conclusions drawn in this dissertation. I estimate this risk to be low for two reasons. First, the final sample, consisting of almost 100.000 articles in total, is the largest volume of DNR/LNR media content that has been analysed so far. While one must be careful not to generalise too much beyond the sample, it is as comprehensive as could reasonably be achieved. Second, as I argue in chapter 2, the DNR and LNR authorities impose a great deal of uniformity on media content production from above. Therefore, major deviations from the "standard line" are not to be expected.

While is important to bear this dissertation's natural limitations in mind, none of them poses insurmountable obstacles to what this dissertation seeks to achieve: namely, a comprehensive analysis of identity building through media discourse in the DNR and LNR between 2014 and 2017.

1 The development of the DNR and LNR political and media landscapes, 2014-2017

1.1 Introduction

This chapter details the development of the DNR and LNR political and media landscapes between the start of the Donbas conflict in early 2014 and the end of 2017. For the sake of clarity, I will discuss political and media-related developments separately, and in this order. So far, no definitive history of the Donbas conflict has been written, although some scholars, including Ol'ha Kalinovs'ka and colleagues[1] and Andrew Wilson[2], have made efforts in this direction. This chapter does not purport to present a comprehensive chronology of the war. Instead, as this dissertation's point of focus is the construction of identity in Donbas, I will focus on the role of ideology and identity in DNR and LNR politics, and mention other developments and events where relevant. This chapter thus serves as a frame of reference for more detailed discussions about legitimacy and identity in occupied Donbas, which is the subject of chapters 2 through 5. I draw on a variety of primary and secondary source material, including statements by officials, press conferences, legal documents, email correspondence, and local, regional and international news articles. Some of the news sources cited in this chapter are part of the corpus analysed in chapters 3, 4 and 5, such as *Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr* and *DONi News*, as they were the primary news source covering a certain event.

1.2 The DNR and LNR's political landscapes

This section follows the most important political developments in the DNR and LNR from the outbreak of the conflict in early 2014 until two key events that occurred at the end of 2017 and August of 2018: the ouster of the head of the LNR, Igor Plotnitskii, by way of a coup d'état, and the death of the head of the DNR, Aleksandr Zakharchenko, by way of a car bomb.

In both the DNR and the LNR, political and ideological projects were established in tandem with the escalation of military engagements in March-April 2014. The first

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[1] Kalinovs'ka et al., *Neoholoshena Viina: Nevidomi Fakty I Khroniky ATO.*
[2] Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

rumblings of such projects were heard in Donetsk in early April, when disgraced Party of Regions MP and former presidential candidate Oleg Tsarev announced the founding of a new "Federal Republic of Novorossiia"[3]. This announcement constituted Tsarev's first attempt to make a name for himself in Donbas as the leader of the "Iugo-Vostok" militia/social movement. His declaration lacked detail, however, and turned out to be premature due to the unstable military situation at the time and the fact that it was still unclear which of the rivalling militias would eventually come out on top[4].

A month later, on May 11 and 12, "referenda" on self-rule were held in Donetsk and Luhansk, an important step in the centralisation of power and the promotion of legal legitimacy in the DNR and LNR[5]. The question on the ballot was the same in both regions: "Do you support the Act of state independence of the Donetsk/Luhansk People's Republic?"[6]. From the start, the organisation of these "referenda" was marred with controversy. The use of the word "independence" led to confusion, as the Russian word that was used on the ballot (*samostoiatel'nost'* instead of *nezavisimost'*) can mean both full independence and something akin to autonomy and self-dependency. A journalist for *Vice News* who was on the ground reported conflicting stories from local residents as to whether they thought they were voting for independence or self-rule within Ukraine[7]. The votes themselves were not monitored by internationally recognised election observers, despite the DNR and LNR's attempts to contact representatives of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) for this purpose[8]. Their democratic legitimacy was contested by the Ukrainian government, journalists and international observers. A German journalist working for *Bild*, who was in Donetsk during the referendum, recorded one man casting his vote 8

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[3] Prestupnosti.net, "Separatist Tsariov Dlia Rossiiskikh SMI Fantaziruet, Chto Nikolaevshchina Voidet V 'respubliku Novorossiia,'" *Www.news.pn*, May 6, 2014, https://news.pn/ru/criminal/103461; Interfax-Ukraine, "Ukraine's Party of Regions Expels Presidential Hopefuls Tigipko, Tsariov and Boiko," *Www.en.interfax.com.ua*, April 7, 2014, https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/199490.html.

[4] Mat Babiak, "Welcome to New Russia," Ukrainian Policy, May 2014, http://ukrainianpolicy.com/welcome-to-new-russia/.

[5] "legal legitimacy" is a concept from legal studies that has a wide range of definitions which I will not all repeat here. By legal legitimacy, I mean the "belief that the law and agents of the law are rightful holders of authority". This belief is promoted in a variety of ways. In this dissertation, I will focus on two of them: building and nurturing a structure that projects legal authority (e.g. through laws or governmental institutions); and projecting legal legitimacy through discourse (e.g. in the media or official government publications). See: Jonathan Jackson et al., "Why Do People Comply with the Law? Legitimacy and the Influence of Legal Institutions," *The British Journal of Criminology* 52, no. 6 (2012): 1051–71, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44174080.

[6] In Russian: "podderzhivaete li Vy Akt o gosudarstvennoi samostoiatel'nosti Donetskoi/Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki"?; See Wikimedia, "Biulleten' Referenduma Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki," www.wikimedia.org, 2014, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/ru/f/fb/Бюллетень_референдума_Луганской_Народной_Республики_%282014%29.png; Wikimedia, "Biulleten' Referenduma Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki," www.wikimedia.org, 2014, https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Референдум_о_самоопределении_Донецкой_Народной_Республики#/media/Файл:Бюллетень_референдума_Донецкой_Народной_Республики_(2014).png.

[7] Harriet Salem, "Eastern Ukrainians Vote for a New Uncertain Future in Rebel Organized Referendum," *Vice News*, May 11, 2014, https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/9kvgm8/eastern-ukrainians-vote-for-a-new-uncertain-future-in-rebel-organized-referendum.

[8] See the supplement (file 1.1) for an example of such correspondence.

times in different voting stations, as well as instances of people from places outside of the DNR, such as Luhansk and Dnipropetrovsk, voting in Donetsk[9]. The *Economist* called the referenda "fake, the product of an extraordinary information war"[10].

The DNR and LNR authorities reported overwhelming margins in favour of independence/self-rule: 89.07% in Donetsk (with a self-reported 74.87% turnout) and 96.2% in Luhansk (turnout 75%). Oleksandr Turchynov, then-acting president of Ukraine, mentioned far lower turnouts (32 and 24% in Donetsk and Luhansk, respectively)[11]. Regardless of these controversies, the results appeared to provide the acting DNR and LNR authorities with the leverage needed to refuse to participate in the Ukrainian presidential elections, to be held later that month. According to the *Guardian*, Denis Pushilin, then-chairman of the DNR, made the following statement:

> All [Ukrainian] military troops on our territory after the official announcement of referendum results will be considered illegal and declared occupiers. […] It is necessary [for the DNR] to form state bodies and military authorities as soon as possible.[12]

Oleg Tsarev, having moved from Donetsk to Luhansk, expressed satisfaction with the results when addressing a group of World War II veterans at a polling station there:

> Having looked at the results of the referendum, we see the way people are going, how they vote. We ask them who they vote for, and we have preliminary results. […] The people support independence, they support the sovereignty of Luhansk and Donetsk, not from the people of Ukraine, but from its fascist authorities.[13]

A political leadership structure was set up to reflect the referendum results as interpreted by the local authorities. In Donetsk, the self-appointed "People's Governor" Pavel Gubarev became president of the DNR. Aleksandr Borodai, a Russian citizen and former advisor to Sergei Aksenov, prime minister of the "Republic of Crimea",

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[9] Paul Ronzheimer, "Wahlbetrug in Der Ukraine," *Www.bild.de*, May 12, 2014, https://www.bild.de/video/clip/wahlfaelschung/wahlbetrug-ukraine-35928762.bild.html.
[10] The Economist, "Ukraine's Bogus Referendums: Alternate Realities," *Www.economist.com*, May 11, 2014, https://www.economist.com/eastern-approaches/2014/05/11/alternate-realities.
[11] Georgii Peremitin, "V Luganskoi I Donetskoi Oblastiakh Podveli Itogi Referenduma," *Www.rbc.ru*, May 15, 2014, https://web.archive.org/web/20140515002538/http://top.rbc.ru/politics/12/05/2014/923136.shtml.
[12] Shaun Walker, Oksana Grytsenko, and Howard Amos, "Ukraine: Pro-Russia Separatists Set for Victory in Eastern Region Referendum," *The Guardian*, May 12, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/11/eastern-ukraine-referendum-donetsk-luhansk.
[13] Lugansk 24, "Lugansk 24. Referendum 11 Maia 2014 G. Oleg Tsarev," *Youtube Video*, May 11, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-c103dZ-_j4.

became the DNR's first prime minister[14]. Igor Girkin, also known by his *nom de guerre* "Strelkov", a Russian nationalist and war veteran who had fought alongside Borodai in Transdnistria in the 1990s, became minister of defence. Aleksandr Zakharchenko, the head of the Donetsk branch of the Kharkiv-based social-political movement "Oplot" and leader of a local militia by the same name, became the DNR's military commander. And Denis Pushilin, a former candy salesman and purveyor of Ponzi schemes, became chairman of the Supreme Council (verkhovnyi sovet), the legislature of the DNR. It was later renamed to People's Council (narodnyi sovet)[15].

A brief but fierce battle for control broke out among the DNR's various factions, which was won decisively by Zakharchenko. In August, Girkin was relieved of his duties as defence minister. He was blamed for mismanaging the Battle of Slaviansk, which had resulted in the Ukrainian army recapturing the city, and for ceding other important territory to Ukraine[16]. He was succeeded by Vladimir Kononov. Borodai, meanwhile, resigned as prime minister, handing over his post to Zakharchenko. His resignation came amidst mounting criticism that Moscow was directing events in eastern Ukraine, and that the demonstrations were less than organic. In Borodai's words, it was time to ensure Donbas was no longer run by a Russian citizen: "I am a Muscovite. Donbas should be led by a genuine Donetsk native"[17]. His resignation, however, did little to persuade most observers that Russia and its armed forces were disengaging from the conflict[18], nor did affirmations that Russian troops captured in Donbas by the Ukrainian army had crossed the border "by accident"[19].

In Luhansk, the process of establishing political leadership was somewhat more tumultuous. Valerii Bolotov, the leader of the South-eastern Army (Armiia Iugo-Vostoka) militia[20], became the first official "People's Governor" of the LNR on April 21. Infighting continued, however, and on May 13 an attempt was made to end his life,

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[14] BBC News, "Ukraine Rebel Leader Borodai Admits to Russia Links," *Www.bbc.co.uk*, July 24, 2014, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-28450303.
[15] Adam Taylor, "Meet the 'Nobodies' Who Said No to Putin," *Washington Post*, May 8, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/05/08/meet-the-nobodies-who-said-no-to-putin/?noredirect=on.
[16] Politrada, "Purgin, Andrei Ievgen'evich," www.politrada.com, 2019, http://politrada.com/dossier/Andrey-Evgenevich-Purgin/.
[17] Christopher Miller, "Russian Resigns to Make Way for Ukrainian as New Head of 'Donetsk People's Republic'," *The Guardian*, August 8, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/08/russian-resigns-ukrainian-head-donetsk-peoples-republic.
[18] Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "The Unusual Difficulty of Tracking Russia's Dead in Ukraine and Syria," *The Washington Post*, October 27, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/10/27/the-unusual-difficulty-of-tracking-russias-dead-in-ukraine-and-syria/?noredirect=on.
[19] BBC News, "Captured Russian Troops 'in Ukraine by Accident,'" *Www.bbc.co.uk*, August 26, 2014, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-28934213.
[20] ITAR-TASS, "Glavoi Provozglashennoi Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki Izbran Valerii Bolotov," *Www.tass.ru*, May 18, 2014, https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1195149.

injuring him[21]. Gennadii Tsypkalov was named as interim head of the LNR the same day, until Bolotov, still recovering, took over again a few days later on May 17.

The Council of Ministers (sovet ministrov) of the LNR was established on May 18 of 2014[22], with Vasilii Nikitin as its prime minister. Aleksandr Kariakin became chairman of the People's Council. Two days later, on May 21, the Republican Assembly of the LNR appointed Igor Plotnitskii as minister of defence[23]. The rest of the cabinet was named in the next session on May 27[24]. Plotnitskii called for a reorganisation of the Council of Ministers. On November 17, he issued a decree declaring the formation of the new Council, which was then officially instated on November 26[25]. Tsypkalov stayed on as prime minister. Aleksandr Chumachenko was appointed as minister of transport, communications, information and mass communication.

Nikitin's term as prime minister ended quickly as the tensions within the uncomfortable alliance between various competing factions came to a head. On July 3, Bolotov issued a decree forcing Nikitin to resign and the Council of Ministers to disband[26]. The stated reason for this was the passing of the law "On the system of executive bodies of state power of the Lugansk People's Republic" and the termination of the law "On the Cabinet of Ministers of the Luhansk People's Republic"[27], a move that effectively nullified the existing political structure. Marat Bashirov, a confidant of Bolotov's, became interim prime minister.

Even Bolotov, however, was not impervious to infighting. On August 14, he tendered his resignation as head of the LNR, stating that his injuries as a result of the assassination attempt in May were preventing him from fulfilling his duties. He was replaced by Plotnitskii[28]. Bashirov resigned soon after as prime minister. He was initially succeeded by Plotnitskii, who briefly held both posts. Gennadii Tsypkalov took

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[21] ITAR-TASS, "Na Narodnogo Gubernatora Luganskoi Oblasti Soversheno Pokushenie," *Www.tass.ru*, May 13, 2014, https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1183110.
[22] ITAR-TASS, "Glavoi Provozglashennoi Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki Izbran Valerii Bolotov."
[23] Rosbalt, "V 'Luganskoi Narodnoi Respublike' poiavilsia Ministr Oborony," *Www.rosbalt.ru*, May 21, 2014, http://www.rosbalt.ru/world/2014/05/21/1271079.html.
[24] Yadocent, "Pravitel'stvo Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki," *Www.yadocent.livejournal.com*, September 3, 2014, http://yadocent.livejournal.com/619501.html.
[25] Glava Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki, "Ukaz O Formirovanii Soveta Ministrov Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki" (2014), https://sovminlnr.ru/docs/ukaz-glavy-o-formirovanii-soveta-ministrov.pdf.
[26] Forbes, "Glava LNR Otpravil Pravitel'stvo v Otstavku," *Www.forbes.ru*, July 4, 2014, http://www.forbes.ru/news/261801-glava-lnr-otpravil-pravitelstvo-v-otstavku.; Vzgliad, "Pravitel'stvo LNR Otpravleno v Otstavku," *Www.vz.ru*, July 4, 2014, https://vz.ru/news/2014/7/4/694120.html.
[27] Narodnyi Sovet Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki, "O Sisteme Ispolnitel'nykh Organov Gosudarstvennoi Vlasti Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki," *Www.nslnr.su*, June 25, 2014, https://nslnr.su/zakonodatelstvo/normativno-pravovaya-baza/600/.
[28] Sergei Kanashevich and Zhanna Ul'ianova, "Glava LNR 'vremenno' ushel v Otstavku Iz-Za Raneniia," *Www.rbc.ru*, August 14, 2014, www.rbc.ru/politics/14/08/2014/570420a89a794760d3d40b1a.

over as prime minister on August 26. Plotnitskii, meanwhile, remained head of the LNR. Tsypkalov held onto his post until his resignation on December 26 of 2015 after being forced out. He was found hanged in his room on September 24 of 2016, after having been arrested on suspicion of planning a coup d'état[29].

The "referenda" and the subsequent centralisation of power cleared the way for attempts to establish the ideological foundations of the DNR and LNR. Most of this activity originated with Tsarev in Luhansk and especially with Gubarev in Donetsk. On May 22, the founding congress took place of Gubarev's new political party (officially a "social-political movement" [obshchestvenno-politicheskoe dvizhenie]), "Partiia Novorossiia". At the conference, Gubarev laid out the party's political and ideological objectives, and proclaimed the founding of the "Federal State of Novorossiia", or "New Russia"[30]. "Partiia Novorossiia"'s programme went into some detail about its historical and cultural foundations:

> The creation of the State of Novorossiia (gosudarstvo Novorossii) is not only the withdrawal of all southeastern Russian lands of Ukraine from subjugation to the authorities in Kyiv, not only the liberation from the yoke of a fascist junta, but also the construction of a new, truly fair, scientifically and technologically developed state, all of whose resources not only in words, but also in reality, belong to the people and are fully used for their benefit.[31]

Gubarev envisioned a new, modern state with an economy focused on science and technological innovation. Culturally, "Novorossiia" was to be part of Greater Russia and the Russian World[32], with Russian as its state language and Orthodox Christianity as its religious norm. Religious discrimination would not be allowed, "with the exception of aggressive totalitarian sects alien to the Russian cultural and civilisational milieu that destroy the foundations of social life and social harmony".

Also in attendance at the conference was Aleksandr Dugin, a controversial far-right Russian academic and public intellectual known for his anti-Western and anti-

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[29] Kirill Bulanov, "V LNR Zaiavili O Samoubiistve Eks-Prem'era Respubliki Tsypkalova," *Www.rbc.ru*, September 24, 2016, https://www.rbc.ru/politics/24/09/2016/57e67bb69a7947715563f478.

[30] V Makeevke - VMakeevke.COM, "Pavel Gubarev v Donetske Vystupil Na S'ezde partii 'Novorossiia,'" *Youtube Video*, May 22, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAP18RkP-5U&feature=youtu.be

[31] Novorossia, "PROGRAMMA Obshchestvenno-Politicheskogo drizheniia 'Partiia NOVOROSSIIA,'" *Novorossia.su*, May 23, 2014, https://novorossia.su/news/programma-obshchestvenno-politicheskogo-dvizheniya-partiya-novorossiya.

[32] The "Russian World" (russkii mir), a term dating back to the 11th century, describes the totality of Russian civilizational space, including cultural values, political organisation, and religious identity. See: Marlene Laruelle, "The 'Russian World': Russia's Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination," 2015, http://globalinterests.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/FINAL-CGI_Russian-World_Marlene-Laruelle.pdf.

Ukrainian viewpoints and his work on political organisation. Dugin published his views on the ideological foundations of "Novorossiia" on Gubarev's website:

> It is important that, among all the regions inhabited mainly by people who reject Kyiv-Galician identity, so far only Donetsk and Luhansk have gone all the way to Independence[33]. This is the land of the Don Army, dominated by a population of Cossacks with a special ethno-social structure and a very warlike and freedom-loving frame of mind. In fact, the DNR and LNR are a new iteration of the Don Cossack Republic (donskaia kazach'ia respublika), which is a special part of the Russian World (russkii mir), very close to the Rostov and Krasnodar regions of Russia, and significantly different from other regions of central and eastern Russia.[34]

Dugin went into detail about the "Cossack identity" of the people of Donbas. He rejected the notion that the DNR and LNR ought to simply become part of the Russian Federation, and instead insisted that "Novorossiia" form a special zone of Russian-Cossack freemen (vol'nitsa). The end goal was not "entry into the Russian Federation", but rather the restoration of the old Russian Empire. Dugin also argued that, while parts of what was to be "Novorossiia" had been "liberated", 12 million people in Donbas continued to suffer under the yoke of "neo-Nazi cartels", who "reject the course taken by the Banderovite Pravyi Sektor, pro-American liberals and murderous Jewish oligarchs". Finally, Dugin expressed the conviction that the "beautiful, delightful little-Russian language" (by which he means Ukrainian) should not become a victim of the DNR and LNR's battle with "Ukrainian Nazism"; the language, he said, is not guilty by itself, and its rich and beautiful history deserves to be part of the "Novorossiian" space.

During the first months of the existence of the DNR and LNR, their leadership was united in a desire to bring the two territories closer together under the banner of "Novorossiia". Two days after the "Partiia Novorossiia" congress, the first self-appointed "prime minister" of the DNR Aleksandr Borodai and then-chairman of the People's Council of the LNR Aleksandr Kariakin signed a document (behind closed doors) confirming the establishment of the "confederation of Novorossiia"[35]. On June

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[33] Dugin uses the word "nezavisimost'" here. Capitalisation in original.
[34] Aleksandr Dugin, "Rozhdenie Novorossii," *Www.novorossia.su*, May 22, 2014, https://novorossia.su/news/rozhdenie-novoroccii.
[35] URA-Inform, "DNR I LNR Ob'edinilis' v Novorossiiu," *Www.ura.dn.ua*, May 24, 2014, http://ura.dn.ua/24.05.2014/156849.html.

26, the DNR and LNR announced the passing of a "constitutional act" establishing a "Union of People's Republics" (Soiuz Narodnykh Respublik; SNR). The SNR constituted the formalisation of the aforementioned confederation:

> We, the representatives of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic, relying on the common historical destinies of the people living in the territories of our states and guided by its desire for unity, proceeding from universally recognised principles of equal rights and self-determination, being convinced that a union of our states will allow us to unite our efforts in the interest of ensuring our security and economic and social development, confirming our desire to live in peace and harmony with other states, hereby acknowledge this Constitutional Act establishing the Union of People's Republics.[36]

Oleg Tsarev was appointed speaker of the SNR joint parliament, and the ideological project of "Novorossiia" appeared well on its way to becoming a reality. Soon, however, the Donbas conflict would make headlines worldwide in a way that substantially limited the DNR and LNR's ability to continue their state-building efforts below the radar[37]. On July 17 2014, Malaysian Airlines flight 17, en route from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, was shot down over the village of Hrabove in DNR-controlled territory. All 15 crew members and 283 passengers, 196 of which were Dutch, were killed instantly. DNR militiamen initially assumed they had shot down a Ukrainian military cargo plane. Igor Girkin, writing under his pseudonym Strelkov, wrote a post on his Vkontakte page around 20 minutes after the crash in which he claimed responsibility for the plane's demise:

> An An-26 airplane was just shot down in the Torez region. It came down somewhere behind the "Progress" mine. We already warned you not to fly through "our skies". Here is video confirmation of the next "birdfall" (ptichkopad).

[36] Vechernii Donetsk, "Respubliki ob'edinilis'. 'Dolzhnost' Prezidenta Ne Predusmotrena,'" *Vecherka.donetsk.ua*, June 26, 2014, http://vecherka.donetsk.ua/index.php?id=4647&show=news&newsid=107644#.W2RF_NJKhPY.
[37] Yulia Abibok, "'The Republic Lives on and Is Managed by Rumours,'" *Open Democracy*, February 19, 2019, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/the-republics-east-ukraine-donetsk-luhansk/.

The bird came down behind a slagheap, residential areas were not affected. Peaceful people were not hurt.[38]

DNR insurgents sent to the crash site to investigate soon found out that the plane was civilian and not military. A few weeks after the crash, an audio recording was released by the Ukrainian Security Service of militants arriving at the scene of the crash expecting to see the remains of an Antonov cargo jet, but instead finding foreign passports, children's teddy bears and suitcases packed for vacation[39]. As soon as it became clear that civilians had been killed, Strelkov deleted his Vkontakte post and DNR officials began issuing denials that they had shot down an airplane[40]. Theories began to circulate in DNR, LNR and pro-Russian media blaming Ukraine for the crash. One popular conspiracy theory alleged that MH17 was shot down by a Ukrainian fighter plane because it looked similar to Vladimir Putin's government jet[41].

Two officials investigations, led by the Dutch Safety Board and the Netherlands-led Joint Investigation Team (JIT), determined that the plane had been hit by a BUK TELAR surface-to-air missile launched from a field that was in DNR militiamen's hands at the time[42]. The MH17 disaster highlighted the extent of Russia's involvement in the Donbas conflict. Based on video evidence, intercepted phone conversations and satellite data, investigations by the JIT, the Dutch Safety Board[43] and investigative journalism website Bellingcat[44] concluded that the missile launch system belonged to the Russian army's 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade, stationed in Kursk. The system was escorted out of the area and back into Russia shortly after the disaster. In 2018, the governments of the Netherlands and Australia held Russia accountable for its role

[38] Igor Ivanovich Strelkov, "Vkontakte Post," *Www.vk.com*, July 17, 2014, https://web.archive.org/web/20140717155720/https://vk.com/wall-57424472_7256.
[39] Karoun Demirjian, "Watch: Ukraine's pro-Russian Rebels Discuss MH17's Black Box in Secret Recording," *Washington Post*, July 20, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/07/20/watch-ukraines-pro-russian-rebels-discuss-mh17s-black-box-in-secret-recording/?noredirect=on.
[40] Alec Luhn, "Three pro-Russia Rebel Leaders at the Centre of Suspicions over Downed MH17," *The Guardian*, July 20, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/20/three-pro-russia-rebel-leaders-suspects-over-downed-mh17.
[41] StopFake, "Time for the Ninth MH17 Disinformation Round," StopFake.org, 2017, https://www.stopfake.org/en/time-for-the-ninth-mh17-disinformation-round/.
[42] Landelijk Parket, "Update in Criminal Investigation MH17 Disaster," *Www.om.nl*, May 24, 2018, https://www.om.nl/onderwerpen/mh17-crash/@103196/update-criminal-0/.
[43] Joint Investigation Team, "Update in Criminal Investigation MH17 Disaster," *Www.politie.nl*, May 24, 2018, https://www.politie.nl/en/news/2018/mei/24/update-in-criminal-investigation-mh17disaster.html.
[44] Daniel Romein, "MH17 - Potential Suspects and Witnesses from the 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade," *Www.bellingcat.com*, February 23, 2016, https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2016/02/23/53rd-report-en/.

in providing the launch system, and would pursue legal avenues to indict those responsible in a court of law[45].

The downing of flight MH17 put the Donbas conflict at the centre of international attention, bringing about concerted efforts to bring about a ceasefire. These efforts culminated in the signing of the first Minsk Protocol in September 2014. It was signed by representatives of the so-called Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine (consisting of Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the OSCE), as well as Plotnitskii and Zakharchenko, representing the LNR and DNR[46]. The protocol contained twelve points, the most important of which were an agreement to an immediate ceasefire and a decentralisation of power in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

The protocol was an almost immediate failure. The ceasefire was violated instantly, leading to the signing of a memorandum clarifying the original protocol and the creation of a 30 kilometre (19 mile) buffer zone between the two warring parties[47]. A few days later, new clashes broke out at the airport of Donetsk, which had been captured by Ukrainian forces in May. The battle continued well into the new year, with both sides suffering heavy casualties until the airport was finally overrun and captured by DNR forces in January 2015[48].

Internally, the simmering tensions between various factions in both the DNR and LNR were beginning to boil over. In Donetsk, Gubarev's star began to wane as other figures expanded their influence. On October 13, the car he was driving in was shot at by unknown assailants and crashed into a pillar. Gubarev escaped with relatively minor injuries[49]. This happened while the DNR and LNR authorities were planning to hold simultaneous parliamentary as well as leadership elections on November 2. It soon became clear that Gubarev's "Partiia Novorossiia", despite its hopeful beginnings, was

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[45] Government of the Netherlands, "MH17: The Netherlands and Australia Hold Russia Responsible," *Www.government.nl*, May 25, 2018, https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2018/05/25/mh17-the-netherlands-and-australia-hold-russia-responsible.
[46] OSCE, "Protokol Po Itogam Konsul'tatsii Trekhstoronnei Kontaktnoi Gruppy Otnositel'no Sovmestnykh Shagov, Napravlennykh Na Implementatsiiu Mirnogo Plana Prezidenta Ukrainy P.Poroshenko I Initsiativ Prezidenta Rossii V.Putina," *Www.osce.org*, September 1, 2014, https://www.osce.org/ru/home/123258?download=true.
[47] OSCE, "Memorandum Ob Ispolnenii Polozhenii Protokola Po Itogam Konsul'tatsii Trekhstoronnei Kontaktnoi Gruppy Otnositel'no Shagov, Napravlennykh Na Implmementatsiiu Mirnogo Plana Prezidenta Ukrainy P.Poroshenko I Initsiativ Prezidenta Rossii V.Putina," *Www.osce.org*, September 19, 2014, https://www.osce.org/ru/home/123807?download=true.
[48] Shaun Walker and Oksana Grytsenko, "Ukraine Forces Admit Loss of Donetsk Airport to Rebels," *The Guardian*, January 21, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/21/russia-ukraine-war-fighting-east.
[49] BBC News, "East Ukraine Rebel Leader Gubarev Unconscious after Ambush," *Www.bbc.co.uk*, October 13, 2014, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-29593949.

out of the loop. The party was banned from participating in elections "failing to meet requirements", along with the local Communist party and the block "Edinyi Donbass". Only so-called "social movements" (obshchestvennye dvizheniia) were allowed to take part, provided they had the proper credentials to do so[50].

The only two entities standing in the DNR elections were "Svobodnyi Donbass", led by Ievgenii Orlov and Iurii Sivokonenko, and "Donetskaia Respublika", led by Zakharchenko. Unlike "Partiia Novorossiia", the latter was not an entirely new entity in the region. According to Taras Kuzio, Donetskaia Respublika was

> a successor to the Inter-Movement of the Donbas founded in 1989 by Andrei Purgin, Dmitrii Kornilov and Sergei Baryshnikov. [...] [Donetskaia Respublika] was launched a year after the 2004 Orange Revolution and, similar to the Soviet-era Inter-Movement, with support from Russian intelligence. [Donetskaia Respublika] and other Russian nationalist groups were provided with paramilitary training in summer camps organised by Aleksandr Dugin […]. [It] was banned by the Ukrainian authorities in 2007-2008.[51]

The main purpose of Donetskaia Respublika was originally to obtain a special status within Ukraine for Donetsk oblast and other parts of Donbas. Until 2014, it was a movement operating in the margins of society. Its rallies were attended by at most 30-50 people at a time[52].

With Gubarev's fall from grace, Donetskaia Respublika became the dominant political force in the DNR. Sivokonenko, Zakharchenko's only competitor for the position of head of the DNR, put up no resistance, and was quoted by the New York Times as saying that he "didn't ask people to vote for [him], because [he doesn't] have any differences in principle with Zakharchenko"[53]. Zakharchenko won handily with 78.93% of the vote, defeating Sivokonenko and independent candidate Aleksandr Kofman,

[50] Aleksandr Artem'ev et al., "Ogranichennyi Vybor: Golosovanie v Donbasse Proidet Pochti Bez Konkurentsii," *Www.rbc.ru*, October 30, 2014, http://www.rbc.ru/politics/30/10/2014/54511705cbb20f139df5ae6e.
[51] See Kuzio (2017) Western experts on Russian aggression in Ukraine, p. 10.
[52] Politrada, "Purgin, Andrei Ievgen'evich."
[53] Andrew E Kramer, "Rebel-Backed Elections to Cement Status Quo in Ukraine," *New York Times*, November 2, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/03/world/europe/rebel-backed-elections-in-eastern-ukraine.html?_r=0.

who was later given the post of foreign minister[54]. Donetskaia Respublika obtained 68 out of 100 parliamentary seats, and Svobodnyi Donbass 32[55].

Parliamentary and leadership elections were also held in Luhansk. Here, the social movement "Mir Luganshchine", led by Plotnitskii, won 69.46% of the votes and obtained 35 out of 50 seats in the Lugansk People's Republic's People's Council. Its main rival, "Luganskii Ekonomicheskii Soiuz" (led by Oleg Akimov), got 21.17% of the electorate behind it, and with that the remaining 15 People's Council seats. The third social movement vying for seats, "Narodnyi Soiuz", received approximately 3% of the votes, failing to meet the electoral threshold. Turnout, incidentally, was registered at 99.99%[56].

The elections, together with the DNR's takeover of the Donetsk airport and the fierce battle for control over the strategic railway town of Debaltsevo a few months later, spelled doom for the first Minsk protocol[57]. At the initiative of French president François Hollande and German chancellor Angela Merkel, a new attempt to broker a ceasefire was made in early February 2015. Marathon talks between Hollande, Merkel, Poroshenko, Putin, Plotnitskii and Zakharchenko, under the auspices of the OSCE, led to the signing of the so-called Minsk-II agreements[58]. As heavy fighting was still ongoing during the negotiations, the agreements were criticised as fragile and unrealistic[59]. Minsk-II contained mostly the same provisions as the original Minsk protocol (including a call for an immediate ceasefire, withdrawing heavy weaponry and artillery, and the creation of a 50 kilometre buffer zone). Importantly, the new agreement also contained a provision on constitutional reform in Ukraine that would acknowledge the special status of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts[60].

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[54] Ukraïns'ka Pravda, "Donets'ki Boiovyky Za Nich Porakhuvaly holosy: 'peremih' Zakharchenko," *Ukraïns'ka Pravda*, November 3, 2014, https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/11/3/7043027/.

[55] DNR Today, "TsIK DNR Oglasil Itogovye Tsifry Rezul'tatov Vyborov 2 Noiabria," *Www.dnr.today*, November 3, 2014, https://web.archive.org/web/20141104053933/http://dnr.today/news/cik-dnr-oglasil-itogovye-cifry-rezultatov-vyborov-2-noyabrya/.

[56] Lugansk-Online, "Na Vyborakh v LNR Bol'shinstvo Golosov Nabrali Igor' Plotnitskii I Obshchestvennoe dvizhenie 'Mir Luganshchine,'" *Www.lugansk-Online.info*, November 3, 2014, https://archive.is/20141103192620/http://lugansk-online.info/news/na-vyborah-v-lnr-bolshinstvo-golosov-nabrali-igor-plotnitskii-i-obshchestvennoe-dvizhenie-mir-luganshchine.

[57] OSCE, "So-Called Elections Not in Line with Minsk Protocol, Says OSCE Chair, Calling for Enhanced Efforts and Dialogue to Implement All Commitments," *Www.osce.org*, October 31, 2014, https://www.osce.org/cio/126242.

[58] OSCE, "OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Gives Full Backing to Minsk Package," *Www.osce.org*, February 12, 2015, https://www.osce.org/cio/140196.

[59] Andrew Foxall, "The Ceasefire Illusion: An Assessment of the Minsk II Agreement Between Ukraine and Russia," Henry Jackson Society Policy Paper, 2015, http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Minsk-II-FINAL-For-Website.pdf; Robert Golanski, "One Year after Minsk II: Consequences and Progress," *European View* 15, no. 1 (2016): 67–76, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12290-016-0398-2.

[60] Financial Times, "Full Text of the Minsk Agreement," *Www.ft.com*, February 12, 2015, https://www.ft.com/content/21b8f98e-b2a5-11e4-b234-00144feab7de.

The future of the DNR and LNR as ideological projects, meanwhile, became more and more uncertain. After the disappearance of Gubarev's "Partiia Novorossiia" from the political stage, the unification of the DNR and LNR (as well as potentially other parts of Ukraine) under the "Novorossiia" banner became increasingly unpopular. On May 18 2015, DNR foreign minister Aleksandr Kofman announced that the "confederation of Novorossiia" would cease to exist "for the time being". This was confirmed by the speaker of the parliament of the Union of People's Republics (SNR), Oleg Tsarev, on the same day. Tsarev's official explanation was that the confederation was not in line with the new Minsk agreements, which did not contain provisions allowing for the independence of eastern Ukrainian territories. The LNR and DNR, however, continued to exist and refer to themselves as independent[61]. In July 2016, one final attempt was made to revive the "Novorossiia" project. Valerii Bolotov, former head of the LNR, announced a surprise return to LNR politics on Facebook by stating he was asked by Novorossiian deputates to become Speaker of the now-defunct Novorossiian Parliament[62]. Bolotov's proposal was quickly shot down by almost everyone involved, with Igor Girkin, the former DNR defence minister, saying that the Novorossiia project had been a "colossal failure for the Kremlin"[63].

The disappearance of the idea of "Novorossiia" from official discourse, however, did not mean the end of ideological projects in the DNR and LNR. In February 2015, the DNR legislature adopted a memorandum declaring the DNR to be the "legal successor" to the Donetsk-Krivoi Rog Soviet Republic (DKR)[64], a self-declared Soviet Republic that existed between February 12 and 20 March 1918. The capital of the DKR was first Kharkiv and then Luhansk, until it was officially abolished at the second All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets and incorporated into the new Ukrainian Soviet Republic[65]. The memorandum stated the following:

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[61] John O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal, and Vladimir Kolosov, "The Rise and Fall of 'Novorossiya': Examining Support for a Separatist Geopolitical Imaginary in Southeast Ukraine," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 33, no. 2 (2017): 124–44, https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2016.1146452; O'Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov, "The Rise and Fall of 'Novorossiya': Examining Support for a Separatist Geopolitical Imaginary in Southeast Ukraine"; Daisy Sindelar, "Out With a Whimper: Novorossia, 2014-2015," *RFE/RL*, May 21, 2015, https://www.rferl.org/a/death-of-novorossia/27029267.html.

[62] Maksim Lesiv, "Eks-glavar' 'LNR' anonsiroval Vozrozhdenie proekta 'Novorossiia,'" *Www.pl.com.ua*, July 15, 2016, https://pl.com.ua/eks-glavar-lnr-anonsiroval-vozrozhdenie-proekta-novorossiya/.

[63] Dialog UA, "Byvshii glavar' 'LNR' Valerii Bolotov 'obradoval' reanimatsiei proekta 'Novorossiia' i Svoim Vozvrashcheniem v Politiku," *Www.dialog.ua*, July 15, 2016, http://www.dialog.ua/news/91693_1468598386.

[64] In Russian: Донецко-Криворожская советская республика (Donetsko-krivorozhskaia sovetskaia respublika).

[65] This action followed the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk between Germany and the new Bolshevik government of Russia. The Treaty stipulated

On February 12 1918, the Donetsk-Krivoi Rog Republic (DKR) was created at the fourth Congress of Soviets of the Donetsk-Krivoi Rog basin, on the basis of ideas of agricultural and economic integration. […] The Donetsk-Krivoi Rog Republic never officially ceased to exist, despite the German occupation, military operations and other social cataclysms. Its ideas have lived on in the hearts and souls of millions of people.

The 'International Movement of Donbas[66]' was created in the late 1980s under the leadership of Dmitrii Kornilov[67], which first raised the black-blue-red flag of the DKR in 1991. In March 1994, the people of Donbass spoke out in favour of a federal structure of the state [of Ukraine]. Federative tendencies were expressed at the Severodonetsk Congress in 2004, where it was decided to hold a referendum in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts on the issue of gaining the status of independent republics. Similar attempts to reorganise the state were declared criminal by the authorities in Kyiv. Popular protests resulted in the creation of the political movement 'Donetskaia Respublika'. The people of Donbass finally confirmed their choice at the 2014 referendum.[68]

Chairman of the DNR's People's Council Andrei Purgin asserted that the memorandum was a "political document about the historical continuity (preemstvennost') between the DKR and DNR. We feel part of this historical construct, which was first proclaimed in 1917"[69]. And while the project originated in Donetsk, the LNR leadership also expressed agreement with the memorandum. Daria Mazaeva, coordinator of the Donetsk-based "Novorossiia" press centre, stated that the move marked the beginning of a movement towards a unification of the DNR and LNR[70]. Observers such as the Russian political scientist Aleksei Makarkin remarked that the move

Figure 5: DNR flag. The coat-of-arms in the centre says "Donetskaia Rus'"

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[66] In Russian: Интернациональное движение Донбасса.

[67] Vladimir Kornilov, Dmitrii's brother, is a self-declared "political analyst and historian" who has written about the Donetsk-Kryvoi Rog Soviet Republic.

[68] Narodnyi Sovet Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki, "Memorandum Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki Ob Osnovakh Gosudarstvennogo Stroitel'stva, Politicheskoi I Istoricheskoi Preemstvennosti," *Www.dnrsovet.su*, February 5, 2015, https://dnrsovet.su/zakonodatelnaya-deyatelnost/memorandumy/.

[69] Russkaia Vesna, "DNR Ob'iavila O Preemstvennosti K Donetskoi Respublike, Provozglashennoi v 1917 Godu," *Www.rusvesna.su*, February 6, 2015, https://rusvesna.su/news/1423248170.

[70] Vladimir Dergachev and Dmitrii Kartsev, "DNR Nashla Sebe Istoriiu," *Gazeta.ru*, February 6, 2015, https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2015/02/06_a_6402557.shtml?updated.

constituted a significant step in the search for a local identity, which DNR and LNR leaders found particularly important in the light of the Minsk-II negotiations[71]. Influential local figures, most notably the aforementioned brothers Dmitrii and Vladimir Kornilov, emphasised the historical significance of the Donetsk-Kryvoi Rog Republic. Its symbols, they claimed, continued to hold relevance in the modern era[72]. For example, as the memorandum cited above suggests, the official DNR flag (see figure 5) was claimed to be based on the DKR flag from 1918. And indeed, Andrew Wilson argues that the foundation of the DKR showed the "determination of the local population to have no truck with Ukrainian nationalism" at the time[73]; employing its historical symbolism could therefore be seen as a way for the DNR and LNR authorities to build legitimacy, and contribute to the formation of a local identity.

Other observers, however, were not convinced that the Donetsk-Krivoi Rog Republic constituted a legitimate historical legacy for the DNR and LNR. For example, Valerii Solovei, a history professor and political analyst at Moscow State University, said the following:

> Some legal justifications (zatsepki), even extremely dubious and ridiculous ones, are necessary to justify [the DNR and LNR's] position in the [Minsk] negotiations. And, of course, this move is at the same time a hint of possible territorial expansion. Historical continuity has merit only when it is backed by resources. And their main resource is the position of Russia. In this case, the key issue is the financial and economic condition of these republics.[74]

Others pointed out that there is no evidence that the DKR flag looked anything like the present-day DNR flag; rather, the black-blue-red banner appears to be that of the aforementioned International Movement of Donbas, which was first presented during a public demonstration in 1991[75] (see figure 6[76]).

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Maxim Edwards, "Symbolism of the Donetsk People's Republic," *Open Democracy*, June 9, 2014, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/symbolism-of-donetsk-peoples-republic-flag-novorossiya/.
[73] Andrew Wilson, "The Donbas between Ukraine and Russia: The Use of History in Political Disputes," *Journal of Contemporary History* 30, no. 2 (1995): 280, https://doi.org/10.1177/002200949503000204.
[74] Dergachev and Kartsev, "DNR Nashla Sebe Istoriiu."
[75] Edwards, "Symbolism of the Donetsk People's Republic."
[76] Andrew Butko, "File:Flag Interdvizheniia Donbassa.svg," *Www.commons.wikimedia.org*, May 28, 2017, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Флаг_Интердвижения_Донбасса.svg.

Figure 6: Flag of the International Movement of Donbas

The Donetsk-Krivoi Rog Republic memorandum proved the last serious bilateral attempt at unification. After a period of relative calm, the animosity between the LNR and DNR leaders Plotnitskii and Zakharchenko began to escalate. On January 23 of 2016, a man named Zorian Shkiriak wrote a post on Facebook claiming that Plotnitskii and Zakharchenko had ordered each other's assassination[77]. Shkiriak worked at the Ukrainian ministry of internal affairs at the time and professed to cite "sources close to both terrorist leaders", claiming that each man was willing to shell out one million US dollars for the other's killing[78]. The main reason for this escalation appears to have been a conflict over railway management and the export of industrial products. In January 2017, Zakharchenko reiterated that the reunification of the DNR and LNR was an "impossibility"[79].

In 2016, the political situation in the DNR and LNR became increasingly volatile. In September, *Luganskii Telegraf,* a Luhansk-based news site and newspaper, reported[80] of a "conspiracy plot" aimed at overthrowing Plotnitskii's government and staging a coup d'état. LNR officials refused to either confirm or deny the report. The grapevine blamed Zakharchenko for instigating the attempted coup, although neither he nor anyone else from the DNR was officially accused of doing so. Several high-profile leaders of armed militias were, however, assassinated. In October 2016, Arsen Pavlov (known under his *nom-de-guerre* Motorola), the Russian-born commander of the pro-DNR "Sparta" battalion, was killed in a bomb blast in a lift in his apartment block[81]. A few months later, in February 2017, Mikhail Tolstykh (*nom-de-guerre* Givi), commander of the "Somali" battalion, was killed in his office when it was hit by a rocket[82]. And in Luhansk, Oleg Anashchenko, the de facto LNR defence minister, was

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[77] Zorian Shkiriak, "Facebook Post," *Www.facebook.com,* January 23, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/zoryan.zoryan/posts/1017773344950279?pnref=story.
[78] Lenta.ru, "MVD Ukrainy Soobshchilo O Planakh Zakharchenko I Plotnitskogo Ubit' Drug Druga," *Www.lenta.ru,* January 24, 2016, https://lenta.ru/news/2016/01/24/skiryak/.
[79] Lenta.ru, "Zakharchenko Ob'iasnil Nevozmozhnost' Ob'edineniia DNR I LNR," *Www.lenta.ru,* January 17, 2017, https://lenta.ru/news/2017/01/17/lnr_dnr/.
[80] Luganskii Telegraf, "Glava LNR Soobshchil O Raskrytom Zagovore Protiv Respubliki," *Www.lgt.su,* September 20, 2016, https://lgt.su/main/5791-glava-lnr-soobschil-o-raskrytom-zagovore-protiv-respubliki.html.
[81] BBC News, "'Motorola': Ukraine Rebels Accuse Kiev over Commander's Death," *Www.bbc.co.uk,* October 17, 2016, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37676607.
[82] BBC News, "Ukraine Conflict: Rebel Leader Givi Dies in Rocket Attack," *Www.bbc.co.uk,* February 8, 2017, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-38905110.

killed in a car bomb attack[83]. The deaths of Motorola and Givi proved especially beneficial to Zakharchenko, whose grip on power was now stronger than ever. The deaths also made reconciliation attempts between the DNR and LNR more feasible. In the same month as Givi and Anashchenko's deaths, Zakharchenko and Plotnitskii announced the start of a social programme providing aid to Donbas residents living in areas under Ukrainian control, stating that the people of Donbas are "one people" and that "no one will be left to the fascists"[84].

Throughout it all, ideological projects stayed on the political agenda. The DNR and to a lesser extent the LNR tried to gain support and recognition from the international community. In 2016, DNR representatives opened an "honorary consulate" in Ostrava in the Czech Republic[85]. A judge disbanded the mission in 2018. Similar (unsuccessful) diplomatic missions popped up in Austria[86] and Greece[87]. The LNR tried to do the same in Sicily[88] and made some headlines in the United States when the retired American mixed martial artist Jeff Monson, who had previously fought in the UFC, announced that he had become an LNR citizen: "Look, I support your fight for your own autonomy, for your own freedom, for your own ability to make decisions for yourself."[89]

Internally, the DNR and LNR's search for an identity was far from over. In August 2016, officials working at the LNR Ministry of Information exchanged emails containing three documents that lined out the LNR's ideological foundations: the "Declaration of the right to self-determination", the "Declaration of Sovereignty", and the "Statement on the ideological principles of the LNR"[90].

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[83] BBC News, "Ukraine Conflict; Rebel Commander Killed in Bomb Blast," *Www.bbc.co.uk*, February 4, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38868600.
[84] Telekanal Iunion, "Fond 'Edinyi Donbass' nachal Rabotu v DNR.," *Www.tk-Union.tv*, March 10, 2017, http://tk-union.tv/fond-«edinyij-donbass»-nachal-rabotu-v-dnr.-10.03.2017-8486.html.; Ievgenii Gordeev, "Rabota Fonda Edinyi Donbass," *Gorlovka NEWS*, April 19, 2017, http://gorlovka-news.su/novosti/novosti-gorlovki/1838-rabota-fonda-edinyj-donbass.
[85] Telekanal "Oplot TV," "Programma 'Kstati': Pochetnyi Konsul DNR v Chekhii Nela Liskova," *Www.youtube.com*, October 25, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IACp2SUA6A.
[86] Euromaidan Press, "Soviet tactics: 'DNR' and 'LNR' 'embassies' pop up in the EU," *Www.euromaidanpress.com*, September 13, 2016, http://euromaidanpress.com/2016/09/13/soviet-tactics-another-dnr-lnr-embassy-pops-up-in-europe/.
[87] Gazeta.ru, "SMI: V Gretsii Otkrylos' Predstavitel'stvo DNR," *Www.gazeta.ru*, March 22, 2017, https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2017/03/22/n_9826481.shtml.
[88] Nikolaus Von Twickel, "Russian puppet 'LNR' opens 'consulate' in Sicily and Other Overlooked Stories from Donbas," *Euromaidan Press*, June 7, 2018, http://euromaidanpress.com/2018/07/06/zakharchenko-enhances-power-donetsk-uni-seeks-russian-accreditation-fake-lnr-consulate-in-eu/.
[89] Alexander Smith, "Jeff Monson, Former UFC Fighter, Is First American 'Citzen' of Ukraine's Rebel Luhansk State," *NBC News*, September 25, 2016, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/jeff-monson-former-ufc-fighter-first-american-citizen-ukraine-s-n653126.
[90] A translation of these documents can be found in the supplement (files 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4)

The "Declaration of the right to self-determination" sets out the reasons why the LNR had the right to secede from Ukraine: the "criminal, anti-constitutional, anti-state coup of February 2014" and the "destruction of Ukraine's statehood" that was started by the "robber baron oligarchs relying on financial, diplomatic, moral and military support from international capital"; as well as an unwillingness to reconcile with the Ukrainian government's "neo-Fascist ideology", all of which left Donbas with no choice but to break away.

The "Declaration of Sovereignty" of the LNR is comparable in scope to the "Declaration of the right to self-determination". It also mentions the 2014 "coup d'état" in Ukraine and the country's subsequent descent into neo-Fascism as prime motivations for secession. It adds that Ukraine's "Russian-speaking population, constituting more than half of the citizens of Ukraine, has not even had its own official language, which in the modern world is an absolutely unprecedented and scandalous fact. These citizens are subject to linguistic and cultural genocide by the state". In addition, the document claims that the transfer of south-eastern Ukraine and Crimea to the Ukrainian Soviet Republic in 1954 was illegitimate and based on "purely political considerations".

The "Statement on ideological principles" goes into more specific detail about the ideological foundations of the LNR. It states that "the traditions of Donbas regionalism have deep roots. Since ancient times, our homeland has been an industrial and mining centre, being the oldest metalworking centre in Europe. In ancient times, the area of Azov and Podontsoviia became an important corridor for trade routes from Asia to Europe." With regards to the development of the LNR since its emergence in 2014, the document states that "by adopting the name People's Republic, the revolutionary leadership voluntarily committed itself to building a system based on popular law. Any other way leads either to a return to oligarchic anarchy, or to a slide into a nationalist, anti-Russian, anti-people Ukrainian swamp." It calls the "purposeful formation of collectivist thinking, the idea of serving one's homeland - the Donbas" as one of the main tasks facing the LNR in the near future. Finally, it situates the LNR firmly within the so-called Russian World, as like during "the Soviet past, the attitude towards a person was never defined by his nationality, for all Russian-speaking people were considered a priori 'our own'".

All three documents also mention the Donetsk-Krivoi Rog Republic as a historical precedent for the DNR and LNR's right to self-determination. "Novorossiia", however, is not mentioned, nor is there any trace of an ambitious ideological framework to achieve a "greater Russia" as espoused by Gubarev and Dugin in 2014. Instead, the main justification for wanting to break away from Ukraine is the ideological shift that Ukraine underwent during and after the Euromaidan revolution.

In Donetsk, the question of ideology resurfaced with a start in July 2017, when Aleksandr Zakharchenko announced the founding of the "new state of Malorossiia", or "Little Russia"[91]. This term has a long and charged history. In tsarist times, it referred to the territories of the Russian empire that later became what is today known as Ukraine[92]. The term "Malorossiia" was first used in the 14th century by the last prince of Galicia, Iurii II Boreslav, and for a long time was used alongside a host of other terms (e.g. Rus' and Ukraine) to denote the lands at the edge of Muscovy, and later of the Cossack hetmanate and Russian empire[93]. After the Pereiaslav agreement of 1654 between Bohdan Khmel'nitskii's Cossacks and the Tsar of Muscovy, "Malorossiia" became the most commonly used term to describe the Cossack hetmanate[94]. Over the course of the next few centuries, "Malorossiia" became a source of self-identification for local elites, and a prototype for national consciousness, not only for local Cossacks but also for Ukrainians seeking to set themselves apart from Russia and Russians[95]. Gradually, however, Ukrainian (as opposed to "Little Russian") identity gained the upper hand in large parts of what is now Ukraine due to the destruction of Cossack hetmanate legal practices and political structures, paired with the rise of Ukrainian national consciousness through humour, music, poetry and literature[96]. Moscow, fearing the rise of nationalism in both Poland and Ukraine, promoted the concept of a "triune" Russian national identity, with Belorussians, Little Russians and Greater Russians all cut from the same cloth[97]. After the revolutions of

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[91] Obshchestvennoe TV Donbassa, "Okruzhenie Zakharchenko. Kto Eti Liudi?," *Www.youtube.com*, September 16, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JufQFeItR6E.

[92] BBC News, "Ukraine Conflict: Russia Rejects New Donetsk Rebel 'State,'" *Www.bbc.co.uk*, July 19, 2017, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-40653913.

[93] Zenon E Kohut, "The Development of a Little Russian Identity and Ukrainian Nationbuilding," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 10, no. 3/4 (1986): 564, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41036271.

[94] Ibid., 565.

[95] A L Kotenko, O V Martyniuk, and A I Miller, "'Maloross': Evoliutsiia Poniatiia Do Pervoi Mirovoi Voiny," *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, August 16, 2011, http://aej.org.ua/analytics/1125.html.

[96] Kohut, "The Development of a Little Russian Identity and Ukrainian Nationbuilding," 573.

[97] Maxim Edwards, "Little Russia, Big Dreams," *Open Democracy*, July 19, 2017, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/little-russia-big-dreams-0/.

1917 and the civil war, the Bolshevik government instated a policy of "korenizatsiia" that (in the Ukrainian SSR) was aimed at promoting Ukrainian language and culture, and Malorossiian identity fell out of use despite multiple attempts to revive it[98].

In his announcement, Zakharchenko claimed that "representatives of Donbas", as well as of 17 Ukrainian oblasts[99] (interestingly not including Crimea), signed a document declaring the Ukrainian state null and void, replacing it with the state of "Malorossiia". This new state would have Donetsk as its capital and Kyiv as a centre of "historical and cultural importance"[100]. Donbas, Zakharchenko claimed, would not reunite with Ukraine; instead, it was Ukraine that would be reuniting with Donbas[101]. Zakharchenko also presented the new Malorossiian flag (see figure 7[102]).

Figure 7: Flag of "Malorossiia" (as presented by Zakharchenko)

Zakharchenko argued that Ukraine had proven itself to be a "failed state", incapable of providing its citizens with "a prosperous present and future". Zakharchenko also announced the creation of an organisational committee, tasked with drafting a constitution for the newly minted state. This committee was to consist of three people: Zakharchenko himself, Zakharchenko's right hand man, vice prime minister of the DNR Aleksandr Timofeev (nickname "Tashkent"), and one Viacheslav Gubin, who declared himself to be a "representative of Kharkiv Oblast"[103]. What exactly the three men meant by "representative" was not immediately clear.

Key figures both inside and outside of the DNR responded to Zakharchenko's announcement with confusion. Initially, nobody knew how to react: Zakharchenko held his press conference at around 8AM local time. Two hours later, by 10AM, both the Luhansk Press Centre (*Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr*) and the English-language

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[98] Kotenko, Martyniuk, and Miller, "'Maloross': Evoliutsiia Poniatiia Do Pervoi Mirovoi Voiny."

[99] Zakharchenko claimed to have support from people from the oblasts of Kharkiv, Dnipro, Zaporizhia, Kherson, Mykolaiv, Odessa, Sumy, Poltava, Chernihiv, Kirovohrad, Kyiv (both the city and the oblast), Cherkassy, Rivne, Volyn, Ternopil', Ivano-Frankivsk and L'viv.

[100] Edwards, "Little Russia, Big Dreams."

[101] Novosti Donetskoi Respubliki, "Glava DNR O Sozdanii Malorossii: Donbass Ne Poidet v Ukrainu, Eto Ukraina Prisoedinitsia K Donbassu," *Www.dnr-News.com*, July 18, 2017, http://dnr-news.com/intervyu/41311-glava-dnr-o-sozdanii-malorossii-donbass-ne-poydet-v-ukrainu-eto-ukraina-prisoedinitsya-k-donbassu.html.

[102] Source: Edwards, "Little Russia, Big Dreams."

[103] Zhenia Vatnik, "Viacheslav Gubin: Ob'iavlenie O Sozdanii Gosudarstva Malorossiia 18 07 17 Aktual'n," *Youtube Video*, July 18, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0jlQPL3MHA.

Donetsk-based *DONi News Agency* were yet to make mention of it. When reactions finally did come, they were mostly derisive. The announcement of the founding of "Malorossiia" took the Kremlin by surprise. The Russian news outlet *RBK* reported that two sources close to Vladimir Putin claimed that the development was "unexpected"[104]. Aleksei Chesnakov, an "expert" close to Vladislav Surkov, a high-level Kremlin official said to be in charge of Russia's involvement in eastern Ukraine, told the *Itar-TASS* press agency that the project was not taken seriously even within the DNR, and that it should be seen as more of a literary project than a political one[105]. "In a month's time", he said, "everyone will have forgotten about Malorossiia".

Then-chairman of the People's Council of the DNR Denis Pushilin issued a carefully worded response later in the day. It became clear that even he had been surprised by Zakharchenko's announcement:

> The creation of this state education project (gosudarstvennoe obrazovanie) of Malorossiia could be an interesting initiative. However, in my opinion, it would have been more correct to submit such questions in advance for discussion in parliament and by way of a national referendum. The issue is debatable, and we must learn the opinion of society. As for the legal aspects [to this case], no formal legislation was passed and the DNR and LNR parliaments are not undertaking political activities in this direction. When such tasks are set by our leadership, we are ready to discuss them. However, at the moment this is only an idea, which is still perceived very ambiguously in both the LNR and the DNR, and in the Russian Federation.[106]

The reaction from the LNR was more blunt. Vladislav Deinego, the LNR's "Foreign Minister", said that the LNR leadership had "learned about this through the media. No one discussed this project with us [beforehand]"[107]. Zakharchenko had overplayed his

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[104] Vladimir Dergachev, "Ideia Zakharchenko O Malorossii Byla Vydvinuta Bez Soglasovaniia S Kremlem," *Www.rbc.ru*, July 18, 2017, https://www.rbc.ru/politics/18/07/2017/596de6549a794753426d8657?utm_source=pushc.; UNIAN, "SMI Uznali, Byl Li Kreml' v Kurse Bredovoi Idei Zakharchenko o 'Malorossii,'" *Www.unian.net*, July 18, 2017, https://www.unian.net/politics/2035014-smi-uznali-byil-li-kreml-v-kurse-bredovoy-idei-zaharchenko-o-malorossii.html.

[105] Ol'ga Gordo and Ol'ga Gal'skaia, "Chto Dlia Donchan Budet Znachit' Malorossiia?," *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, July 18, 2017, https://www.kompravda.eu/daily/26706/3731023/.

[106] Denis Pushilin, "Zaiavlenie Denisa Pushilina O Sozdanii Gosudarstva Malorossiia," *Www.denis-Pushilin.ru*, July 18, 2017, https://denis-pushilin.ru/news/zayavlenie-denisa-pushilina-o-sozdanii-gosudarstva-malorossiya/.

[107] Novosti Donetskoi Respubliki, "Initsiativa Sozdaniia Malorossii Iavliaetsia Nesvoevremennoi - Deinego," *Www.dnr-News.com*, July 18, 2017, http://dnr-news.com/dnr/41314-iniciativa-sozdaniya-malorossii-yavlyaetsya-nesvoevremennoy-deynego.html.

hand, overestimating local elites' and the Kremlin's willingness to go along with his idea. A few weeks later, he backed away from the "Malorossiia" project, stating that the "overturning of Ukraine evoked much interest within society", but that the name "Malorossiia" was receiving little support[108]. The ultranationalist Russian writer Zakhar Prilepin, an early proponent of the DNR and LNR who had been involved with the "Malorossiia" project from the start, stated in an interview that the idea behind "Malorossiia" had been to surprise Moscow, Washington and Kyiv, and that the end goal was a "unified state with Russia and Belarus"[109]. But in the end, despite well-known figures like Pavel Gubarev openly identifying with a "Malorossiian" identity[110], the project was officially abandoned.

In Luhansk, internal tensions between influential political figures came to a head at the end of 2017. On November 9, Plotnitskii forced his interior minister, Igor Kornet, with whom he had had several political altercations before, to give back his lavish house in Luhansk to its supposed lawful owner, in a rather humiliating display that was broadcast on live TV[111]. 11 days later, Plotnitskii fired Kornet. The official reason for this firing was Kornet's supposed illegal seizure of private property. Kornet, not happy with this development, contested his firing in public. Plotnitskii, however, had underestimated Kornet's popularity: a contingent of soldiers loyal to Kornet prevented Plotnitskii from appointing a successor for the position of interior minister.

The next day, on November 21,ˈ troops arrived in Luhansk, wearing no insignia except for white ribbons. While many initially suspected these troops to be Russian special forces, rumours soon started to swell of DNR forces being involved. For example, some observers noted the similarities between known DNR military vehicles and vehicles spotted in the LNR[112]. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission also observed

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[108] Lenta.ru, "Zakharchenko Priznal Nezhelatel'nost' Upotrebleniia slova 'Malorossiia,'" *Www.lenta.ru*, August 9, 2017, https://lenta.ru/news/2017/08/09/dnr/.
[109] Aleksandr Kots, "Zakhar Prilepin: Tsel' Malorossii - Ob'edinennoe Gosudarstvo S Rossiei I Belorussiei," *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, November 18, 2017, https://www.penza.kp.ru/daily/26705/3731002/; Edwards, "Little Russia, Big Dreams."
[110] Hiroaki Kuromiya, "Pavel Gubarev as a 'Little Russian,'" *Historians.ua*, March 20, 2016, http://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/en/avtorska-kolonka/1839-hiroaki-kuromiya-pavel-gubarev-as-a-little-russian.
[111] The original video used to be on YouTube, but has since been removed, see: Christopher Miller, "What In The World Is Going On In The Russia-Backed Separatist Luhansk 'Republic'?," *RFE/RL*, November 22, 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-luhansk-armed-masked-men-what-is-going-on-kornet-plotnitsky/28870308.html.
[112] Necro Mancer, "Twitter Post," *Www.twitter.com*, November 21, 2017, https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/932994937662078977?ref_src=twsrc%255Etfw&ref_url=https%253A%252F%252Fmedium.com%252Fmedia%252F9d475c0841cab64d4981d9500443d6de%253FpostId%253Dc77705325e38.

a large convoy of military vehicles near Debaltsevo, in DNR territory, on its way to Luhansk[113].

These rumours were confirmed one day later, when the DNR ministry of state security came out stating that the DNR had carried out a "security operation" inside the LNR, with cooperation from the LNR interior ministry[114]. Kornet gave a press conference in which he claimed that an "intelligence operation" had penetrated the high ranks of the LNR leadership, and that his interior ministry had detained "about 10" agents involved in this plot. Kornet accused this cabal of giving Plotnitskii "distorted information". Plotnitskii also gave a press conference on the same day to react to the situation. When asked about what was going on, he denied that anything was the matter. He called Kornet names, stating among other things that "this small man has big ambitions (u etogo malen'kogo cheloveka vzygrali bol'shie ambitsii)"[115].

Plotnitskii's grip on power was slipping. His former allies began to put out reports to discredit him. For example, the LNR's ministry of state security put out a report saying that the former LNR prime minister Gennadii Tsypkalov had not, in fact, hanged himself, but that he had "died from torture" and that the medical examiner's reports were falsified by one "Kachenko"[116]. The implication was that Plotnitskii had been involved. Reports also came out alleging that the failed 2016 coup attempt was secretly organised by Plotnitskii himself to get rid of his opponents[117].

Plotnitskii's position soon became untenable. On November 22, he fled to Moscow. In the wake of this shake-up, Ukrainian forces tried to make use of the instability to take back several LNR-controlled towns. Heavy fighting broke out in the village of Krymske. Plotnitskii's website was taken off the air[118].

Two days later, the head of the LNR ministry of state security, Leonid Pasechnik, announced that Plotnitskii had resigned voluntarily for health reasons. Plotnitskii was

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[113] OSCE, "Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), Based on Information Received as of 19:30, 21 November 2017," *Www.osce.org*, November 22, 2017, http://www.osce.org/special-monitoring-mission-to-ukraine/358186.
[114] Ministerstvo Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti DNR, "Novosti I Svodki MGB DNR '22.22.2017,'" *Www.mgbdnr.ru*, November 22, 2017, https://mgbdnr.ru/news.php?id=20171122_00&img_num=0.
[115] Matthew Luxmoore, "Rival Factions Battle for Control in Eastern Ukraine," *New York Times*, July 22, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/22/world/europe/luhansk-ukraine-feuding.html.
[116] Ministerstvo Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki, "Eks-Predsedatel' Soveta Ministrov LNR Genadii Tsypkalov Umer Ot Pytok, - Sledovatel' Genprokuratury," *Mgblnr.org*, November 22, 2017, http://mgblnr.org/media/133f496d-42ee-4905-8cd8-8a10c9334ef3.
[117] Nikolaus Von Twickel, "Explaining the Coup in Luhansk," *Open Democracy*, July 24, 2017, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/explaining-coup-in-luhansk/.
[118] www.glava-lnr.su. A cached version of this website is here: http://web.archive.org/web/*/www.glava-lnr.su

allowed to remain a representative of the LNR in the Minsk negotiations, as he was one of its signatories. Pasechnik became the new head of the Luhansk People's Republic. Kornet continued to serve as interior minister[119].

The involvement of DNR troops in the LNR coup could have been a precursor to increasing hostilities between the two sides, but this was not the case. On November 30, Igor Kornet made a public announcement that the LNR security service had foiled an assassination attempt on Aleksandr Zakharchenko's life. The same people, according to him, had been involved in the killing of Oleg Anashchenko, the former LNR defence minister[120]. Whether there really was a plot to kill Zakharchenko was unclear, but Kornet's announcement did manage to bring the mounting tensions down.

Eventually, however, Zakharchenko's knack for surviving assassination attempts caught up with him. On August 31, 2018, Zakharchenko, together with DNR finance minister Aleksandr Timofeev and their security detail, entered the "Separ" café in Donetsk to have a meal. Seconds after, an explosion, caused by a device planted in a car outside, killed Zakharchenko and wounded Timofeev[121]. It was unclear who was behind the killing; Russian president Vladimir Putin accused the Ukrainian security service, and DNR security officials soon arrested what they called "Ukrainian saboteurs". The Ukrainian government, meanwhile, blamed infighting rebels and their "Russian sponsors" for Zakharchenko's death[122]. In anonymous channels on private messaging apps such as Telegram, which for many DNR and LNR residents served as a source of information for lack of opposition media, rumours began to circulate of Moscow's involvement in the assassination. Yulia Abibok argues that Zakharchenko's attempts to put together private militias that took orders from him and not Moscow had angered Vladislav Surkov and others within the Russian government, potentially providing a reason for getting rid of him[123]. The case remains unsolved.

One of the key unanswered questions about the political situation in the DNR and LNR is why two republics sprang up instead of one. This matter has never been publicly

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[119] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Zaiavlenie Pasechnika L.I.," *Www.lug-Info.com*, November 24, 2017, http://lug-info.com/news/one/zayavlenie-pasechnika-li-30162.

[120] Novosti Donbassa, "Kornet Rasskazal O Podgotovke Pokusheniia Na Zakharchenko," *Novosti.dn.ua*, November 30, 2017, http://novosti.dn.ua/news/277002-kornet-rasskazal-o-podgotovke-pokushenyya-na-zakharchenko.

[121] BBC Russian, "Lidera DNR Aleksandra Zakharchenko Vzorvali v Donetske," *Www.bbc.com*, August 31, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-45374142.

[122] BBC Russian, "Vzryv v 'Separe'. Versii Gibeli Aleksandra Zakharchenko," *Www.bbc.com*, August 31, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-45375642; BBC News, "Ukraine Conflict: Blast Kills Top Donetsk Rebel Zakharchenko," *Www.bbc.co.uk*, August 31, 2018, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-45371270.

[123] Abibok, "'The Republic Lives on and Is Managed by Rumours.'"

addressed by any DNR or LNR official[124]. The answer can be found by looking at the initial stages of the conflict. Throughout 2014, power in the DNR and LNR was divided between various loosely organised armed groups (the aforementioned "Armiia iugo-vostoka", the "Somali" battalion, the LNR "People's Militia", et cetera). The DNR and LNR, in the words of Nikolai Mitrokhin, should therefore be seen as a "conglomerate of local principalities" at this time, consisting of people of various walks of life and political persuasions: true believers in the "Novorossiia" project, small-time criminals looking to make some money, former military personnel, people down on their luck, or simply political or financial opportunists. Especially in Luhansk, conflicts and tensions between rivalling field commanders would escalate into violence with some regularity. Slowly but surely, two dominant forces rose to the top (Zakharchenko and Plotnitskii) who managed to push their real and imagined rivals away from the centre of power and gain the approval of influential figures in Moscow[125]. After this initial centralising phase, some have blamed Plotnitskii (and not so much Zakharchenko) for stymying further unification attempts between the DNR and LNR[126]. While it is difficult to know exactly why the DNR and LNR never unified due to the lack of official statements on the matter, this section has highlighted the process through which the statelets grew from unorganised but well-armed militiamen into political and economic projects. The next section will discuss how these political developments were reflected in the DNR and LNR's media landscapes.

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[124] Ibid.
[125] Mitrokhin, "Gang Warfare and State Building: The Future of the Donbass [Bandenkrieg Und Staatsbildung: Zur Zukunft Des Donbass]."; Mitrokhin, "Transfer of dictatorship: 'State Building' in Russia's 'People's Republics' [Diktaturtransfer Im Donbass: Gewalt und 'Staatsbildung' in Russlands 'Volksrepubliken']."
[126] Abibok, "'The Republic Lives on and Is Managed by Rumours.'"

1.3 The DNR and LNR's media landscapes

This section provides an overview of the development of the media landscape in Donbas after the start of the DNR/LNR insurgency. For the sake of brevity and clarity, several high-profile case studies will be highlighted alongside a more general description of events.

1.3.1 Taking over

Gaining control over the media was a priority for the DNR and LNR authorities, as witnessed by the large number of incidents of repression, violence and hostile takeovers of media outlets. Tables 2, 3 and 4 below summarise the reported incidents that had to do with journalists or the mass media in DNR-, LNR- and Ukrainian-controlled territory, respectively. These incidents are categorised as deaths, the arrest or kidnapping of journalists, disappearances, physical attacks and injuries (beatings as well as injuries sustained in battle), threats of violence or retaliation, attacks on editorial offices or printing houses, the forced suspension of publications and broadcasts, the blocking of access to certain websites or news sources (e.g. by blocking online content) and legal crackdowns by the authorities (e.g. instating mandatory accreditation or registration for journalists). A complete timeline of reported incidents such as attacks on editorial offices, the disappearance, assault or death of journalists and the shutting down of media outlets between 2014 and 2017 can be found in the supplement that accompanies this dissertation[127]. In addition, the spreadsheet in this chapter's supplement gives an overview of all media outlets, press agencies, official web pages and other relevant information agencies in the DNR and LNR[128].

Table 4 below is included for reference. It lists incidents in Ukrainian-controlled territory and includes incidents in the parts of Donbas outside of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts that witnessed a significant deal of pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian demonstrations over the course of early 2014, as well as high-profile incidents that occurred after Ukraine regained control over these territories, such as the murder of various journalists and the passing of laws pertaining to the regulation of the information

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[127] Supplement, file 1.6.
[128] Supplement, file 1.7.

sphere and the mass media. These events will not be discussed in detail here, but more information can be found in the timeline in the supplement.

DNR-controlled territory	Dec 2013-Mar 2014	Apr-May 2014	Jun-Aug 2014	Sep-Dec 2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Deaths		2	1	1	1			5
Arrests/kidnappings		18	20	3	3			44
Disappearances		4				1	1	6
Physical attacks & injuries	7	10	3	1	2		1	24
Threats of violence	1	3	1		1	1		7
Editorial offices attacked	1	13	6		1			21
Suspensions of publication	2	9	6	3	3	1		24
Blocking of access	8	1				2	1	12
Forced emigrations	1	4	16					21
Legal crackdowns		1	3	1	1		1	7
Total	20	65	56	9	12	5	4	171

Table 2: Incidents in DNR-controlled territory, 2014-2017

LNR-controlled territory	Dec 2013-Mar 2014	Apr-May 2014	Jun-Aug 2014	Sep-Dec 2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Deaths			2					2
Arrests/kidnappings		1	8	1	1	2		13
Disappearances				1		1		2
Physical attacks & injuries	2	5	3		1			11
Threats of violence		1	2	1	1	1		6
Editorial offices attacked		1	2	1	1			5
Suspensions of publication		14	3		1			18
Blocking of access	1	1			4			6
Legal crackdowns				1		1		2
Forced emigrations		1	16					17
Total	3	24	36	5	9	5	0	82

Table 3: Incidents in LNR-controlled territory, 2014-2017

Ukrainian-controlled territory	Dec 2013-Mar 2014	Apr-May 2014	Jun-Aug 2014	Sep-Dec 2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Deaths					2	1		3
Arrests/kidnappings		2	2	1			1	6
Disappearances								0
Physical attacks & injuries	4							4
Threats of violence		1				5	1	7
Editorial offices attacked								0
Suspensions of publication		1			1		1	3
Blocking of access	2					1	1	4
Legal crackdowns					4		1	5
Forced emigrations								0
Total	6	4	2	1	7	7	5	32

Table 4: Incidents in Ukrainian-controlled territory, 2014-2017

The conflict turned Donbas into an extremely dangerous place to be a journalist. A total of 215 significant incidents occurred in the DNR and LNR between 2014 and the end of 2017 that related to the process of gaining control over these regions' media landscape. These numbers are estimates; in all likelihood, the true number of incidents is much higher.

The disappearance, kidnapping and even death of journalists became regular occurrences. Between 2014 and 2017, 7 journalists lost their lives in DNR- and LNR-controlled territory. In May 2014, the Italian photographer Andrea Rocchelli and his translator Andrii Mironov died during a mortar shelling in the village of Andreevka, near Slaviansk[129]. One month later, Igor Korneliuk, a correspondent working for the Russian channel *VGTRK*, suffered lethal injuries during the shelling of the town of Mirnyi in Luhansk oblast. His colleague, Anton Voloshin, a video engineer, also died[130]. A few days later, Anatolii Klian, a camera operator working for the Russian *Channel 1*, died after coming under fire in the vicinity of a Ukrainian military unit in Donetsk oblast, where his crew was filming a reportage[131]. In August, DNR militiamen reported that they had discovered the remains of Andrei Stenin, a Russian photojournalist for *Rossiia Segodnia, RIA Novosti, ITAR-Tass* and other outlets. Stenin had been reported missing while working as an embedded reporter in the conflict zone[132]. In November, crime reporter Aleksandr Kuchinskii, editor-in-chief of *Kriminal Ekspress*, and his wife were found dead near Slaviansk. They were stabbed to death[133]. Kuchinskii had long reported on criminal gang activity in his hometown Donetsk[134]. And in February 2015, Serhii Nikolaev, a photojournalist for the Kyiv-based newspaper *Segodnia*, died in the hospital after being injured in a shelling near the village of Piski in Donetsk oblast[135].

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[129] Federica Seneghini, "Ucraina, Morto Andy Rocchelli. Arriva La Conferma Della Farnesina," *Corriere Della Serra*, May 24, 2014, https://www.corriere.it/esteri/14_maggio_24/ucraina-giornalista-italiano-ucciso-villaggio-donetsk-ac190120-e378-11e3-a0b2-0f0bd7a1f5dc.shtml.

[130] BBC Russian, "Dvoe Sotrudnikov Rossiiskoi VGTRK Pogibli Pod Luganskom," *Www.bbc.com*, June 17, 2014, https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/06/140617_journalist_vgtrk_ukraine_korneliuk.

[131] OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, "OSCE Representative Warns about Appalling Journalists' Safety Situation in Eastern Ukraine after Death of One More Journalist, Calls for Thorough Investigation," *Www.osce.org*, October 30, 2014, https://www.osce.org/fom/120566.

[132] Institut Masovoï Informatsiï, "V 'DNR' rozpovily, Shcho Znaishly Bilia Snizhnoho Obhorile Tilo Rosiis'koho Zhurnalista Stenina," *2014*, August , http://imi.org.ua/news/v-dnr-rozpovili-scho-znayshli-bilya-snijnogo-obgorile-tilo-rosiyskogo-jurnalista-stenina/.; OSCE, "Latest from OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine Based on Information Received as of 18:00 (Kyiv Time), 21 August 2014," *Www.osce.org*, August 22, 2014, https://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/122920.

[133] Obozrevatel', "Na Donbasse Ubili Zhurnalista. Vmeste S Zhenoi," *Www.obozrevatel.com*, November 29, 2014, https://www.obozrevatel.com/politics/40852-v-slavyanskom-rajone-ubityi-izvestnyij-zhurnalist-i-ego-zhena.htm.

[134] Prestupnosti.net, "V Slavianske Naiden Ubitym Glavred Donetskogo Izdaniia - SMI," *Www.news.pn*, November 30, 2014, https://news.pn/ru/criminal/119779.

[135] Hromadske, "Na Donechchyni Zahynuv Fotokor Serhii Nikolaev," *Www.hromadske.ua*, February 28, 2015, https://hromadske.ua/posts/na-donechchyni-zahynuv-fotokor-serhii-nikolaiev.; Institut Masovoï Informatsiï, "U Piskakh

For the most part, however, journalists were not systematically killed. Rather, the DNR and LNR authorities used intimidation tactics to induce compliance or pressure journalists into leaving the region. Many did. By mid-2016, the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine estimated that around 500 media workers had relocated from DNR- and LNR-controlled areas to other parts of Ukraine[136]. An unknown number of others stayed behind but quit their profession. This was achieved through intimidation, threats, kidnappings, arrests, and in some cases physical violence. In the early stages of the conflict, representatives of the DNR and LNR would regularly accost journalists covering anti-Kyiv or pro-DNR/LNR demonstrations and force them to turn off their cameras, destroy their equipment[137], or physically assault them[138]. In other cases, journalists would be detained, sometimes for up to two weeks[139].

As the DNR and LNR authorities strengthened their grip, they wasted no time taking control of the region's mass media. Television channels were the first to be seized. The Luhansk-based local television channel *IRTA* first became an object of interest to separatist groups on March 10 of 2014. Members of the "Luganskaia Gvardiia" militant group went into *IRTA*'s office and verbally threatened and cajoled the journalists present. A video of the event shows the altercation[140]. Despite the threatening atmosphere, *IRTA* continued to broadcast. A second, unsuccessful attempt to take over the television station was made on April 29[141]. On May 30, Valerii Bolotov held a press conference in which he declared *IRTA* to be a "vehicle of heavy propaganda for the Kyiv regime, which is shooting its own people and our fighters in the back"[142]. *IRTA* was then taken off the air and replaced with the Russian TV channel *LifeNews*.

Unaslidok Obstrilu Zahynuv fotohraf 'Segodnia' Serhii Nikolaev," *Www.imi.org.ua*, February 28, 25AD, https://imi.org.ua/news/u-piskah-zaginuv-fotograf-segodnya-sergiy-nikolaev/.

[136] Ilona Sabera, "The Struggle of Displaced Journalists in Ukraine," *Open Society Foundations*, February 22, 2016, https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/struggle-displaced-journalists-ukraine.

[137] Institut Masovoï Informatsiï, "Pid Chas Sthturmu U Mariupoli Nevidomi Napaly Na Zhurnalista Ta Rozbyly Tekhniku," *Www.imi.org.ua*, April 24, 2014, https://imi.org.ua/news/pid-chas-shturmu-u-mariupoli-nevidomi-napali-na-jurnalista-ta-rozbili-tehniku/.; TSN Ukraina, "Pid Chas Zvil'nennia Zakhoplenoï Mis'krady Mariupolia Postrazhdalo P'iatero Liudei," *Www.tsn.ua*, April 24, 2014, https://tsn.ua/politika/pid-chas-zvilnennya-zahoplenoyi-miskradi-mariupolya-postrazhdalo-p-yatero-lyudey-346781.html.

[138] Institut Masovoï Informatsiï, "U Donets'ku Z Nozhem Napaly Na Zhurnalistiv Brytans'koho Kanalu ITV," *Www.imi.org.ua*, April 29, 2014, http://imi.org.ua/news/u-donetsku-z-nojem-napali-na-jurnalistiv-britanskogo-kanalu-itv/.; Richard Gaisford, "Twitter Post," *Www.twitter.com*, April 28, 2014, https://twitter.com/richardgaisford/status/460815254361223168/photo/1.

[139] The Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović, "'Media Freedom under Siege in Ukraine'" (Vienna, 2014), https://www.osce.org/fom/118990?download=true.

[140] Telekanal LOT, "Bez Kupiur. Zakhvat telekanala 'IRTA'.," *Www.youtube.com*, March 10, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNafXk-03y8.

[141] Lilit Rebrova, "'LNR-TV': Chto Pokazyvaiut Golubye Ekrany 'respubliki'?," *Informator.media*, August 17, 2014, http://informator.media/archives/171483.

[142] Russnov.ru, "Press-Konferentsiia V.D. Bolotova 30.05.2014," *Www.rusnov.ru*, May 30, 2014, http://russnov.ru/press-konferenciya-v-d-bolotova-30-05-2014/.

National television channels were also targeted. On May 1, the largest Ukrainian channels *Pershyi Natsionalnyi, 1+1* and *Channel 5* were taken off the air by representatives of Valerii Bolotov's "South-Eastern Army" militia (Armiia Iugo-Vostoka). Under pressure from them, the Luhansk Radio and Television Centre stopped broadcasting all Ukrainian channels, and began broadcasting Russian ones instead. In mid-May, Bolotov ordered cable companies to stop broadcasting most Ukrainian channels. Local news stations were also taken off the air, including *LKT, IRTA* and *LOT*[143].

While television channels were seized almost instantly, newspapers continued to publish more or less unrestricted for about a month. Around 600 newspapers were registered in and around Luhansk at the start of 2014. Of these, around 200 were being printed regularly. Some of these newspapers were seen as more or less independent, but many of them were considered to be no more than PR outlets for former president Viktor Ianukovych's Party of Regions, which prior to the 2014 revolution had been the largest political party in Donbas. Around mid-May, armed men in camouflage gear began to enter newspaper offices, demanding positive coverage of the LNR and the "Novorossiia"-project. Newspapers were suffering from power outages, and for a brief while almost no newspapers were printed and distributed throughout the region[144]. Only the Luhansk-based newspaper *XXI Vek* was allowed to keep publishing, using a gasoline-powered generator as a power source. Other newspapers in the towns and cities under LNR control were shut down[145]. By the time the electricity was working again, many newspaper employees had fled the region.

A similar process occurred in the DNR. Starting in April 2014, Ukrainian television channels were taken off the air and replaced with Russian channels until local television stations could be established. Oftentimes, this was done through coercion and violence. The authorities took control of television and broadcasting towers in the region, and used signal blockers to shut out Ukrainian television and radio signals.

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[143] PRportal, "Boeviki 'LNR' i Mediaprostranstvo Luganshchiny," *Www.prportal.com.ua*, 2014, https://prportal.com.ua/Peredovitsa/boeviki-lnr-i-mediaprostranstvo-luganshchiny.
[144] Luganskii Telegraf, "Glava LNR Soobshchil O Raskrytom Zagovore Protiv Respubliki."
[145] PRportal, "Boeviki 'LNR' i Mediaprostranstvo Luganshchiny."

Print media in the DNR immediately became the subject of repression. On May 6, DNR officials made their way into the editorial office of *Torezskii Gorniak*, a small newspaper from the town of Torez. The officials began smashing equipment, warning journalists to change their editorial line. The journalists refused, and the officials left. On June 6, on a newly instated holiday called the "Day of the Journalist", separatist officials went back to the *Torezskii Gorniak* office and burned it down[146]. Another small newspaper from Donetsk, simply named *Donbass*, suffered a similar fate. According to its editor-in-chief Aleksandr Brizh, the paper was allowed to continue its work for a short while after the DNR took over. On June 2, however, armed men walked into their office claiming to represent the DNR administration. Brizh and several of his associates, including *Donetsk Vechernyi* editor-in-chief Leonid Lapa (a newspaper operating from the same building), were removed from the offices and led to a cellar, where they were questioned. The interrogators stated that the staff had to either start working for "them" or be shot in public. Brizh and his colleagues fled Donetsk and were forced to continue publishing from the nearby city of Mariupol[147].

Other local journalists were more eager to join the insurgency. Sergei Shvedko, editor-in-chief of a Novoazovsk-based newspaper named *Rodnoe Priazov'e*, had directed his newspaper to oppose the Euromaidan demonstrations in Kyiv and supported calls for an independence referendum for Donbas. When Novoazovsk was taken over by the Ukrainian army in June of 2014, Shvedko decided to leave for the city of Kuban' in southern Russia. When the town was eventually recaptured by the DNR, Shvedko returned and resumed his work[148]. Another high-profile case was that of Stanislav Aseev (also known under his pseudonym Stanislav Vasin), a Donetsk-based author and journalist who wrote about the DNR for *Ukraïns'ka Pravda* and *Radio Liberty*.

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[146] Mikhail Horodetskii, "Torezskuiu gazetu 'Gorniak' razgromili Separatisty," *Www.day.kyiv.ua*, May 8, 2014, http://day.kyiv.ua/ru/article/media/torezskuyu-gazetu-gornyak-razgromili-separatisty; Pro Gorod, "Na Sleduiushchii Den' Posle Pogroma v Redaktsii gazety 'Gorniak' g. Torez," www.youtube.com, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOYrAp7DuuA
[147] Natal'ya Prigodich, "Glavnyi Redaktor gazety 'Donbass' Aleksandr Brizh: 'Iz Redaktsii Menya Vyveli Pod Dulom Avtomata,'" *Www.tut.by*, February 20, 2015, https://news.tut.by/society/436459.html?crnd=4043; Ostrov, "Pomoshchnik Pushilina Richard Yali, Ranennyi v Rezul'tate Vzryva Vozle Donetskoi OGA, Umer v Bol'nitse," *Www.ostro.org*, June 14, 2014, http://www.ostro.org/regions/37/society/news/article-446954/.
[148] Aleksandr Vlasenko, ""My Zhili Kak v Okkupatsii'. Zhurnalist S Donbassa Izbezhal Zastenok SBU," *Www.aif.ru*, October 5, 2016, http://www.aif.ru/society/people/my_zhili_kak_v_okkupacii_zhurnalist_s_donbassa_izbezhal_zastenok_sbu; Korrespondent, "Glavred Gazety Rodnoe Priazov'e Ne Svyazyvaet Isk Gazmanova S Korolevskoi," *Www.korrespondent.net*, July 13, 2012, https://korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/1371729-glavred-gazety-rodnoe-priazove-ne-svyazyvaet-isk-gazmanova-s-korolevskoj.

Aseev was taken captive by DNR operatives in June 2017 and accused of spying for Ukraine. He remained imprisoned for two years[149].

1.3.2 Reconstruction

After this initial phase in which existing media structures were broken down and replaced by outlets and people favourable to the new authorities, a key phase directed toward the development of a new media landscape began. The supplement to this dissertation contains a spreadsheet that provides an overview of the DNR and LNR media landscape, including newspapers, websites, television channels and radio stations[150]. Some of the numbers below are based on the data from this supplement.

The DNR established a "ministry of information and communications" in August 2014, with the goal of "regulating the mass media and building a unified information space", according to its head, Elena Nikitina[151]. Nikitina would remain the DNR's minister of information for three years[152]. She made it a priority to set up local television channels such as the *First Republican Channel* (Pervyi Respublikanskii), *TV Novorossiia* and *Oplot TV*. Under the supervision of Janus Putkonen, a Finnish journalist who had relocated to Donetsk, the DNR authorities also set up *DONi Donbass News Agency TV*, an internet-cum-television channel, broadcasting partly in Russian and partly in English[153]. It also ran an English-language YouTube channel until it was banned for violating YouTube's terms and conditions with regards to "spam, misleading practices or misleading content"[154].

In total, 12 local television channels and 8 radio stations were set up, focusing on the provision of news and, to a lesser extent, entertainment. 25 news websites came

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[149] Radio Svoboda, "SBU Podtverdila: V Donetske Ischez Zhurnalist Aseev (Vasin)," *Www.svoboda.org*, June 11, 2017, https://www.svoboda.org/a/28540720.html.; Aleksander Dmytruk, "V SBU Pidtverdyly Znyknennia Publitsysta Aseeva U Donets'ku I Povidomyly pro Ioho Poshuku," *Www.hromadske.ua*, June 11, 2017, https://hromadske.ua/posts/v-sbu-pidtverdyly-znyknennia-publitsysta-asieieva-u-donetsku-i-povidomyly-pro-ioho-poshuky.
[150] This supplement (file 1.6) also contains information on DNR and LNR social movements and political parties, academic journals, as well as an overview of local media outlets that operate in opposition to the DNR and LNR authorities.
[151] Ministerstvo Informatsii Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki, "Postanovlenie Soveta Ministrov Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki Ot 10.08.2018 G. No 10-37 'Ob Utverzhdenii Polozheniia O Ministerstve Informatsii Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki'. Opublikovano 06.09.2018," *Www.mininfodnr.ru*, September 6, 2018, http://mininfodnr.ru/postanovlenie-soveta-ministrov-donetskoj-narodnoj-respubliki-ot-10-01-2015g-1-18-ob-utverzhdenii-polozheniya-o-ministerstve-informatsii-donetskoj-narodnoj-respubliki/.; ITAR-TASS, "V DNR Sozdano Ministerstvo Informatsii I Sviazi," *Www.tass.ru*, August 18, 2014, https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1386960.
[152] Donetskoe Agenstvo Novostei, "Elena Nikitina, Vozglavliavshaia v 2014-2017 Godakh Mininform DNR, Predstavila v Donetske Knigu Menuarov," *Www.dan-News.info*, July 12, 2018, https://dan-news.info/politics/elena-nikitina-vozglavlyavshaya-v-2014-2017-godax-mininform-dnr-predstavila-v-donecke-knigu-memuarov.html.
[153] The website (https://dninews.com/donitv) was up until mid-2017 but has since been taken offline.
[154] The link to the (deleted) channel can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCw2reJns9WzoFmGDLgNTyUw

online with news about the conflict and the DNR. The vast majority of these websites published in Russian, but in some cases an English-language page was available as well. One website (*DONi News*) catered to an international audience and published primarily in English, but also in Russian, Ukrainian, Italian, French, Finnish and Swedish. Additionally, 52 newspapers were either set up or continued to publish under their old name after the DNR took over. But although the DNR ministry of information and other legislative bodies were quick to establish a legal framework that severely limited the media's capability to operate (see chapter 2), there was no formal structure for state-run news outlets for several years after the outbreak of the conflict. This changed in March 2017, when the DNR set up the "Republican Media Holding" (respublikanskii media kholding), "in order to ensure the implementation of state policy in the field of public and mass communications, the formation and promotion of a positive image of the Donetsk People's Republic, the regulation of activities and content in the field of television and radio broadcasting, printing and publishing, the improvement of efficiency and the optimisation of the work of the ministry of information of the Donetsk People's Republic and subordinate institutions, organisations and enterprises"[155]. Under the Holding came 18 local media outlets[156], one for each city or major town in the DNR. Some of these were entirely new and some were long-running, well-known papers operating under new management. The authorities also tried to increase their control over media and journalists from outside the DNR.

After the signing of the Minsk agreements in February 2015, the DNR ministry of information created a colour-coded list of local, Ukrainian as well as western media outlets: "neutral" media outlets were coloured yellow, orange was given to outlets that "require monitoring by the Secret Service", and red was for "bad" outlets whose journalists should be "deported", should they ever try to report from DNR territory[157]. Valerii Gerlanets, editor-in-chief of *Vestnik DNR*, defended the existence of this list on DNR television, stating that it did not constitute actual censorship but a kind of

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[155] Sovet Ministrov Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki, "O Sozdanii Gosudarstvennogo Predpriiatiia 'Respublikanskii Media Kholding,'" *Doc.minsvyazdnr.ru*, March 10, 2017, https://doc.minsvyazdnr.ru/docs/o-sozdanii-gosudarstvennogo-predpriyatiya-respublikanskiy-media-holding.

[156] Specifically: *Golos Respubliki, Donetskoe Vremia, Donetsk Vechernii, Novaia Zhizn', Rodnoe Priazov'e, Torezskii Gorniak, Novyi Luch, Debal'tsevskie Vesti, Kochegarka DNR, Novye Gorizonty, Iasinovatskii Vestnik DNR, Nashe Vremia, Znamia Pobedy, Snezhianskie Novosti, Makeevskii Rabochii DNR, Rodina, Enakievskii Rabochii.*

[157] Novosti Donbassa, "'DNR' vvela Praktiku Raznotsvetnykh Spiskov Dlia Zhurnalistov," *Novosti.dn.ua*, September 16, 2017, http://novosti.dn.ua/news/274327-dnr-vvela-praktyku-raznocvetnykh-spyskov-dlya-zhurnalystov.

"internal" censorship, as journalists have to preserve the "quality" of the publication that they work for[158]. But some journalists working in the area derided the list as arbitrary and inaccurate. For example, Anna Nemtsova, a correspondent for *Newsweek* and *The Daily Beast*, reported being denied accreditation in the DNR for using the term "separatist" to describe DNR militants[159].

In the LNR, the process of building a domestic media landscape only began in earnest in 2015. On February 7, Viacheslav Stoliarenko was appointed minister of information politics, print and mass communication. His post was created as separate from Aleksandr Chumachenko's, who (rather confusingly) was minister of transport, communications, information and mass communication. Chumachenko's remit related mostly to taking care of communications infrastructure. Stoliarenko's job would be to focus on media content. To add to the confusion, the ministry of transport, communications, information and mass communication was split up into a ministry of transport and a ministry of communications in July 2015[160]. Mikhail Surzhenko, previously Chumachenko's deputy minister, was appointed minister of communications. One of his first actions was to announce the advent of an LNR-based mobile phone provider[161].

Having taken control of the airwaves, printed press and to a lesser extent the online media space, Stoliarenko's ministry began to develop a local broadcasting system. The State Television Company of the LNR (Gosudarstvennaia Telekompaniia LNR) began broadcasting on *LOT*'s former frequency, making use of technology and equipment that previously belonged to *LOT* and *IRTA*. The majority of its staff consisted of former local TV employees. In August 2014, the first local television programme was broadcast from Luhansk, with the help of *LifeNews*[162]. *Luhansk-24* became the main LNR-based TV channel for "many citizens of Luhansk"[163].

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[158] Obshchestvennoe TV Donbassa, "Aresty Blogerov organizatsiiami 'L-DNR,'" *Www.youtube.com*, September 6, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIJumwn9jys.

[159] Vitalii Atanasov, "Reporting from Ukraine's Separatist Areas Is Becoming More Difficult," *Www.indexoncensorship.org*, July 17, 2017, https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2017/07/reporting-ukraines-separatist-areas-becoming-difficult/.

[160] Ministerstvo Sviazi i Massovykh Kommunikatsii Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki, "Press-Konferentsiia O Sozdanii Ministerstva Sviazi LNR," *Www.mslnr.su*, July 28, 2015, https://mslnr.su/8-press-konferenciya-o-sozdanii-ministerstva-svyazi-lnr.html.

[161] RIA Novosti, "Minister Sviazi LNR: V Respublike Budet Svoi Mobil'nyi Operator," *Www.ria.ru*, July 31, 2015, https://ria.ru/world/20150731/1155824498.html.

[162] Okkupatsiia.net, "Rozhdenie Zhurnalistiki LNR: Ne Govorit' Pravdu Ne Mogli (VIDEO)," *Www.okkupatsiya.net*, June 15, 2016, http://okkupatsiya.net/7294-rozhdenie-zhurnalistiki-lnr-ne-govorit-pravdu-ne-mogli-video/.

[163] Institut Masovoï Informatsiï, "U Donets'ku Separatysty Zakhopyly telekanal 'Iunion,'" *Www.imi.org.ua*, May 9, 2014, http://imi.org.ua/news/u-donetsku-separatisti-zahopili-telekanal-yunion/.

Stoliarenko also introduced an accreditation system for all media operating on LNR territory. The newspaper *XXI Vek* became the first printed outlet to receive an official seal of approval from the LNR ministry of information on July 8. On December 4, Stoliarenko claimed that 73 media outlets had been officially registered in the LNR: 42 internet outlets, 18 printed newspapers and magazines, 4 television channels and 4 radio stations. By December 26, this had risen to 92, including 42 printed outlets[164]. 5 of these outlets were privately run, the rest were either run by the authorities in Luhansk or by local officials. While not mentioned explicitly in official documentation, 15 news sites became accessible, some focusing on local residents and others choosing audiences in Russia or Ukraine as their main focus. As the LNR consisted of 14 administrative units, 14 "state" newspapers were established under the auspices of local authorities[165]. These newspapers were distributed (nearly) for free to all residents of the LNR.

In 2016, the LNR authorities ordered local internet providers to block customer access to a list of websites[166]. Most of the sites on the list were Ukrainian news sources such as *Argumenty*, *Hromads'ke* and *Unian*[167]. The DNR, however, did not follow the LNR's example. An investigation by the Digital Security Lab Ukraine in 2018 revealed that DNR residents could access most, if not all websites without restrictions, despite both territories having very similar legal frameworks[168].

The exact extent to which the Russian government was involved in the DNR and LNR's media strategy has been a point of contention, but it is clear that it is substantial. In June 2016, Ukrainian activists published a large data dump of emails from 2015, sent to and from the LNR's Ministry of Information's email account[169]. These emails

[164] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Mininform v 2015 Godu Zaregistriroval v Respublike 92 SMI," *Www.lug-Info.com*, December 26, 2015, http://lug-info.com/news/one/mininform-v-2015-godu-zaregistriroval-v-respublike-92-smi-ministr-9493.
[165] Sovet Ministrov Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki, "O Vnesenii Izmenenii v Proekt Programmy Sotsial'no-Ekonomicheskogo Razvitiia Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki Na 2016 God," *Www.sovminlnr.ru*, June 19, 2016, https://sovminlnr.ru/akt/25.07.2016/373.pdf.
[166] Ministerstvo Sviazi i Massovykh Kommunikatsii Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki, "O Vnesenii Izmenenii v Prikaz Ministerstva Informatsii, Pechati I Massovykh Kommunikatsii Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki Ot 22 Marta 2016 Goda No 10-OD," *Www.sovminlnr.ru*, March 22, 2016, https://sovminlnr.ru/akty-ispolnitelnyh-organov/ministerstvo-svyazi/4292-o-vnesenii-izmeneniy-v-prikaz-ministerstva-informacii-pechati-i-massovyh-kommunikaciy-luganskoy-narodnoy-respubliki-ot-22-marta-2016-goda-10-od.html.
[167] Digital Security Lab Ukraine, "Rezul'taty Vymiriuvan' Internet-Blokuvan'. Lugans'k, Donets'k, Serpen' 2018," Google Drive document, 2018, https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1qZ5cKfiTv_67TE2ottAqYwPj05VlQmw0YhoVqQgpXEk/edit#gid=1489080196.
[168] Digital Security Lab Ukraine, "Findings of Analysis of Internet Blocking in Ukraine (March 2019)," *Www.medium.com*, June 24, 2019, https://medium.com/@cyberlabukraine/findings-of-analysis-of-internet-blocking-in-ukraine-march-2019-b20e23c17aee.
[169] Jochen Bittner, Arndt Ginzel, and Alexej Hock, "Glückspropaganda Und Hass Auf Befehl," *Die Zeit*, September 29, 2016, https://www.zeit.de/2016/41/russland-propaganda-ostukraine-separatisten-e-mails.

contained numerous exchanges between LNR officials and "consultants" from Russia, most likely from within the Kremlin. The most important document that was uncovered in this leak was published by the German news outlets *ZDF* and *Die Zeit.* Entitled "Strategy of internal information politics in the Luhansk People's Republic" (strategiia vnutrennei informatsionnoi politiki v Luganskoi Narodnoi Respublike), this 41-page document constitutes a manual for LNR officials for their internal media strategy. A similar document was not made public for the DNR, but it is likely that its media strategy was highly similar. My English translation can be found in the supplement to this dissertation[170]. The document describes not only the means of gaining control over information resources (through the "unified presentation of information", a "systematic approach" and an "active position"), but also the leading thematic concepts and editorial lines that were to be promoted by the LNR's media resources. These include:

- *the development of the "junta" image*: Ukraine has been taken over by a "fascist junta" of unscrupulous murderers and thieves, aided by Western operatives, particularly from the US.
- *"it's worse in Ukraine"*: Ukraine's economy is plummeting and standards of living are dropping rapidly for all Ukrainian citizens. Russian speakers are persecuted, as are those who do not agree with Poroshenko's policies and members of the Russian Orthodox Church. This has caused all those capable of leaving to abandon the country for Europe, Russia or even Moldova.
- *Ukraine is to blame for the LNR's misery*: Through blockades, artillery shelling, diplomatic pressure and relentless information politics, Ukraine has set out to destroy the image and reputation of the LNR.
- *LNR patriotism*: Regional patriotism must be cultivated by promoting heroic stories of fallen citizens and "warriors" of the LNR, by highlighting positive examples of sacrifice by common people, and by encouraging "pride" in the LNR's successes.
- *Russia is helping out*: Russia is a reliable ally of the DNR and LNR. Today's Russia is no longer the Russia of the 1990s, and it now stands on equal footing with the West. The image of a benevolent Russia is to be cultivated by

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[170] Supplement, file 1.5.

emphasising the "Russian World", Russia's humanitarian efforts, and the sacrifices (e.g. sanctions) that Russia makes on behalf of Donbas.

- *Putin as the DNR/LNR's "saviour"*: Putin's popularity is to be used with great care, so as not to discredit him in the eyes of LNR residents. Without him, things would have been much worse, and he does not leave "his people" out to hang.

- *The Minsk negotiations are of the utmost importance*: LNR diplomates are participating in the Minsk negotiations to bring an end to the fighting. Ukraine is participating in form but not as an honest actor, and in reality wants to continue the war.

- *The Russian Orthodox Church supports the LNR*: The Russian Orthodox Church is popular in the LNR, and its support for the LNR "People's Militia" should be highlighted. On top of that, the Church unifies the "Russian World".

- *An LNR ideology must be constructed and promoted*: ideology is an important step in the construction of statehood. The LNR is pursuing "cultural sovereignty" from Ukraine's "Banderovite" ideology, which has led to the outbreak of the war. The content of this ideology, specifically, is to be determined by "leading authors and scholars" in the LNR.

The document thus provides insight into what narratives the authorities and their Russian "consultants" deemed worthy of attention. It does not say, however, in what proportion each narrative is to be administered, nor does it detail which of the above narratives is considered most important or to what extent topics not related to the above narratives (e.g. sports coverage) should be allowed. In addition, while it pays special attention to the construction of a local ideology, the document does not delve deeply into details about what kind of ideology is to be promoted, only that it should involve the "Russian World" in some way.

These efforts to give shape to a new media landscape in the DNR and LNR not only involved the creation and nourishment of pro-DNR/LNR media outlets, but also spawned a set of laws, rules and regulations to place all media in the DNR and LNR under the same framework. These laws and regulations, and their effect on the media landscapes of the DNR and LNR, are subject to thorough analysis in Chapter 2.

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the most important political and military developments in DNR- and LNR-controlled territory from the start of the conflict in early 2014 until the end of 2017 (as well as the death of Zakharchenko in August 2018), paying special attention to ideology and identity. I have also detailed the DNR and LNR's information policy and the breakdown and reconstruction of local media landscapes.

Politics in DNR- and LNR-controlled territory has been violent and highly volatile. Continuous internal tensions, assassinations, disappearances and changes of power fuelled a persistent state of instability and political chaos. Nevertheless, the authorities managed to build, at least in form, the political and economic structures required to build legal legitimacy: political parties and "social movements" were established, elections (if unfree and unrecognised) were held, and ministries and local governance structures were set up to carry out the policies passed by the DNR and LNR's "People's Councils".

The mass media were placed under the authorities' control almost immediately. This takeover was accompanied by a great deal of pressure, violence, arrests and even deaths. Journalists considered undesirable were detained, beaten or tortured; editorial offices of unfriendly news outlets were ransacked, torched or fired at; and journalists and editors were told to either start publishing material from a pro-DNR/LNR perspective or leave the region indefinitely.

Television was the new authorities' first priority: towers and studios were seized, Ukrainian television channels were taken off the air and replaced with Russian ones, and eventually new channels were set up, broadcasting pro-DNR/LNR news bulletins as well as entertainment programmes. Next came the newspapers. Most of the well-known and well-read publications either changed their name (along with their staff) or went out of print. Some managed to obtain accreditation from the authorities to keep publishing. In other cases, entirely new newspapers were created, replacing the old ones but making use of their offices and infrastructure. Dozens of internet outlets were also set up, publishing mostly in Russian but in some cases also in English and several other European languages.

After an initial phase of breaking down the existing media landscape began a period of building up a local, pro-DNR/LNR media space. The DNR and LNR Ministries of Information, established in August 2014 and February 2015 respectively, promoted local media production and set limits to what was allowed to be published by implementing accreditation procedures and keeping track of journalists working in the region. This formalisation occurred through a system of laws, decrees, edicts and other regulations passed by the DNR and LNR's People's Councils. The next chapter will go into detail about these laws and how they gave shape to the structure of the DNR and LNR media landscapes.

The matter of ideology building became a key issue in both the DNR and the LNR. Public statements by officials and internal documentation show that questions around identity were subject to many discussions over the first three years of the unrecognised republics' existence. This started in April and May of 2014 with the founding of the "Novorossiia" project by Pavel Gubarev and Oleg Tsarev. After this project failed to materialise into a consistent ideological framework, the DNR and LNR authorities, as well as several citizens of the Russian Federation, explored numerous other historical concepts as progenitors of DNR and LNR identity, such as the Donetsk-Krivoi Rog Soviet Republic, Malorossiia, the "Russian World", and the history of Donbas as a fiercely independent-minded stretch of land, inhabited by coal miners and industrial workers with a strong will of their own. In addition, the DNR and LNR authorities sought to promote justifications for their desire for autonomy and independence by pointing at events going on in Ukraine (such as the instalment of the allegedly "fascist" post-Maidan government) that were said to be irreconcilable with the will of the people of Donbas.

These primarily historical references to DNR and LNR identity were highly prevalent in internal documentation and officials' public statements, but this does not in itself allow us to draw firm conclusions about the nature of legitimacy and identity in the DNR and LNR. Legitimacy is also built by projecting official authority and fulfilling the functions of a "state". The next chapter will therefore zoom in on how legitimacy was constructed through a system of laws and regulations aimed at controlling the mass media. Furthermore, official statements say little about if, how and to what extent

conceptions of identity were presented to the people residing in DNR/LNR territory or audiences outside of it. I will therefore also examine what discourses people were exposed to over the course of the DNR and LNR's existence, to what extent these discourses contained or were devoid of identity rhetoric, the proportionality of each of these discourses vis-à-vis each other, and how these discourses have changed with changing circumstances. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of this dissertation will explore these questions by examining media content in local newspapers and news websites in the DNR and LNR.

2 Media regulation in the DNR and LNR

2.1 Introduction

Lawmakers in the DNR and LNR began establishing a legal framework for domestic and international media almost immediately after the start of the conflict. The DNR "People's Council" passed the first media law on May 14 of 2014, followed shortly after, on May 18, by the LNR. Between 2014 and 2017, the DNR and LNR authorities signed 34 and 24 laws, decrees, statutes and other legal documents to regulate the mass media, respectively[1]. This legal framework forms the primary structure under which media actors in these territories operate. The principles that underlie media legislation are thus indicative of how the DNR and LNR authorities viewed the role of the media. In addition, uncovering these principles will offer insight into the role that political ideology and collective identity played in the construction of the DNR and LNR's legislative bodies. In their famous work *Four Theories of the Press*, Siebert, Peterson and Schramm posit four models ("theories", in their words) of media landscape development[2]:

- *Authoritarian:* the success of individuals is assumed to depend on the success of the group. The state, as the highest form of group organisation, is essential to the development of its citizens. And since these citizens are assumed by rulers to be incapable of grasping the purpose and intentions of the state, the mass media should advance and support the state's policies. The state is an active player in determining what information reaches the public, and how this information is presented.

- *Libertarian:* individuals are assumed to be endowed with certain inalienable rights and capable of making mostly rational decisions. The state's role is to make sure these rights are guaranteed. The role of the mass media is therefore to inform the public about what the government is doing and other matters that the public may find of interest. This cannot happen if the press is controlled by any authority outside of itself. Therefore, the right of the state to interfere in the mass media is restrained, and its actual influence is limited.

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[1] The supplement contains a full English-language summary of these documents (files 2.2 and 2.3).
[2] Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press: The Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility and Soviet Communist Concepts of What the Press Should Be and Do* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1956).

- *Social Responsibility:* while libertarian in its origins, the emphasis of this theory is not on the freedom of the press, but rather on its responsibility to society. Although based on the assumption that individuals should be free to choose how and where they receive their information, the role of mass media in social responsibility theory is not only to inform, but also to contextualise, analyse, and editorialise. The educational aspect of the mass media takes on a larger role than in the libertarian view, and states that espouse the former often place more emphasis on public broadcasting and state subsidies for media outlets.

- *Communist:* based on the works of Hegel and Marx, this theory is highly similar to the authoritarian view: the function of the mass media is not primarily to inform, but to transmit social policies to the public. Criticism of individual failures and instances of corruption is permissible, but the media are not allowed to attack a society's underlying premises. In addition, the role of the media is to promote a certain ideology (which may be Communist, Fascist or something else). It is especially this latter point that distinguishes the Communist theory from the Authoritarian model.

The Communist model is somewhat outdated due to the disappearance of communism as a dominant state ideology, and today may also be simply called "ideological"[3]. I will do so for the remainder of this chapter. To help account for this outdatedness, Vera Tolz and Yuri Teper identify a fifth, more contemporary model that they call "neo-authoritarian":

> In neo – authoritarian countries the political leadership will strive to maintain a situation that allows it to control the setting of the public agenda and the articulation of official discourse, while permitting a degree of media diversity in terms of ownership and the political leanings of individual outlets.[4]

The goal of the neo-authoritarian model is to "manipulate citizens' ability to make informed political choices", thus maintaining a degree of political legitimacy without running the risk of allowing for too much political freedom and be removed from power.

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[3] Florian Toepfl, "Beyond the Four Theories: Toward a Discourse Approach to the Comparative Study of Media and Politics," *International Journal of Communication* 10 (2016): 1530–47, https://doi.org/1932–8036/20160005..

[4] Vera Tolz and Yuri Teper, "Broadcasting Agitainment: A New Media Strategy of Putin's Third Presidency," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 34, no. 4 (July 4, 2018): 213–27, https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2018.1459023.

Rather than the direct censorship that is imposed under the authoritarian model, neo-authoritarian states allow for dissent and discontent to be voiced in the media, and provide the constitutional and legal protections required to do so (at least in writing), but intervene when it begins to pose a threat.

The "four theories" framework has been criticised over the years for being inherently unempirical and for not paying enough attention to non-state actors[5], as well as being normative and overly partial to the libertarian model[6]. This critique is fair, as Siebert and colleagues do not prescribe a methodology for assessing what theory a given state might adhere to. The challenge is therefore to develop a methodological framework for empirically assessing to which of the four models of the press (plus the fifth neo-authoritarian model) best describes a state or territory's media landscape.

To develop such a methodology, it is useful to look at how media freedom is assessed and evaluated in the real world. Five indices are used by NGOs, think tanks and others to analyse the broad concept of media freedom[7]:

- The Freedom of the Press Index by Freedom House
- The Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
- The Media Sustainability Index by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX)
- The Media Development Indicators by UNESCO
- The African Media Barometer by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

Of these indices, only the latter is regional in scope rather than global. The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung index is based on "home-grown criteria derived from African Protocols and Declarations like the "Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa"[8] by the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)"[9]. Since this index was developed to be applicable in the African context, its criteria cannot be

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[5] Jennifer Ostini and Anthony Y H Ostini, "Beyond the Four Theories of the Press: A New Model of National Media Systems," *Mass Communication and Society* 5, no. 1 (2002): 41–56, https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0501_4.

[6] John C. Schramm, "The Four Theories of the Press Four and a HalfDecades Later: A Retrospective," *Journalism Studies* 3, no. 1 (2002): 133–36, https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700120107374.

[7] Laura Schneider, "Media Freedom Indices: What They Tell Us - and What They Don't. A Practical Guidebook," 2014, 7, http://www.dw.com/downloads/28985486/mediafreedomindices.pdf.

[8] African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, "Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa" (Banjul, The Gambia, 2002), http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/achpr/expressionfreedomdec.html.

[9] Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, "The African Media Barometer (AMB)," www.fesmedia-africa.org, 2017, http://www.fesmedia-africa.org/home/what-we-do/africa-media-barometer-amb/.

assumed to apply to media landscapes elsewhere. It will thus not be included in this chapter.

Each of the four remaining organisations has decided on a number of criteria that, taken together, can be expressed as an index. While each index is calculated differently, they all draw from similar propositions. Each includes media legislation as a key assessment criterion, and provides guidelines on how to assess and categorise a piece of media legislation. These indices thus provide a toolkit that can be used to determine which of the four theories of the press best reflects a state's regulatory landscape. The supplement to this dissertation contains the complete assessment framework for each of the four indices[10]. Five categories were identified that pertain to the assessment of media legislation[11]:

- *Legal protections of the media as enshrined in law*: constitutional protections of freedom of speech, opinion, editorial independence, and the press, as well as other legal restrictions imposed on journalists, bloggers and media outlets in the penal code or in other laws. Examples of factors that limit media freedom include the absence of constitutional protections, vague or arbitrary definitions of what is deemed acceptable speech, legally circumscribed restrictions of media freedom in the name of "national security", and the absence of "Freedom of Information" legislation.
- *Opinion crimes*: how the expression of opinions is regulated. Limiting factors are laws or regulations prohibiting or discouraging the free expression of opinions on matters of religion, nationalism, culture, and similar topics.
- *Accreditation:* the process of accreditation for local and international journalists. Limiting factors include a trivial, arbitrary or unnecessarily thorough registration process, a regulatory body that is controlled or unduly influenced by the state, a preferential treatment for state or state-controlled media, and if the authorities have legal control over the establishment of news outlets, both online and offline.

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[10] Supplement, file 2.1.
[11] Freedom House, "Freedom of the Press 2017 Methodology," www.freedomhouse.org, 2017, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press-2017-methodology.; IREX, "Media Sustainability Index," www.irex.org, 2017, https://www.irex.org/resource/media-sustainability-index-msi.; Reporters Without Borders, "Detailed Methodology," www.rsf.org, 2017, https://rsf.org/en/detailed-methodology.

- *Defamation or libel:* ideally, libel and defamation laws are rigorously and narrowly defined and applied in a specific, predictable way. Libel and defamation charges are often used by states as a way to curtail journalistic activities. Limiting factors include if libel/defamation are part of the criminal or civil code, if truth is a defence to libel charges, if public officials are specially protected under insult or defamation laws, and if such laws are broadly or arbitrarily defined.

- *Censorship:* how censorship is defined and regulated. This includes not only the official prohibition of censorship, but also the officially sanctioned monitoring and deletion of sensitive or critical (internet) content, whether it originates from the country or territory itself or is produced elsewhere.

Using the above framework, a country or territory's media legislation can be classified on a spectrum from permissive to restrictive, according to the presence or absence of cases of legal protections, references to opinion crimes, accreditation procedures for journalists, defamation and libel procedures, and passages relating to censorship. This classification can then be used to assess which model of the press is most applicable to the body of legislation in the aggregate.

In this chapter, I will thus answer the following questions:

- What laws and regulations pertaining to the mass media have come about in the DNR and LNR between 2014 and the present day?
- How do these laws and regulations compare to each other?
- What model of the press best explains the DNR and LNR's regulatory landscape?

2.2 Data set

The data set for this chapter includes

- The laws (zakony), statutes (polozheniia), bylaws (rasporiazheniia) and rulings (postanovleniia) passed by the People's Councils of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics;

- The decrees (prikazy) issued by the ministry of information of the Donetsk People's Republic and the relevant ministries (under various names) of the Luhansk People's Republic; and

- The edicts (ukazy) issued by the heads of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics

that directly or indirectly pertain to the regulation of media outlets, journalistic activities, and the dissemination, reception and reproduction of information in the DNR and LNR between 2014 and the end of 2017. In total, the data set comprises 58 documents, varying in length from one page to approximately 150 pages. The documents were retrieved from the official website of the Donetsk People's Republic[12], which archives all legal documents, the official website of the People's Council of the Luhansk People's Republic[13], and the websites of the various ministries (of information, communications, et cetera) that over time have been responsible for the regulation of the media and the flow of information in both territories. My English-language translation and summary of these documents can be found in the supplement[14].

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[12] www.dnr-online.ru
[13] www.nslnr.su
[14] Supplement, files 2.2 and 2.3.

2.3 Media legislation in the DNR

The documents regulating the mass media adopted by the legislative and executive bodies of the Donetsk People's Republic between 2014 and 2017 paint a complex picture of an increasingly restrictive media landscape. Freedom of the press was officially guaranteed, both in the constitution and by law. Censorship was formally prohibited. Other freedoms and rights such as freedom of thought, information, and the press were also enshrined in law[15]. There thus existed a formal legislative framework that, in theory, allowed journalists to conduct their activities without fear of repercussions from the authorities.

The above rights and freedoms, however, were constrained by a number of other regulations. First, the propagation of information that promotes "social, racial, national or religious hatred and enmity" or a "cult of violence and cruelty", or otherwise "demoralises society", was not allowed[16]. Furthermore, numerous laws also forbade justifying and propagating 'terrorism"[17] and "extremist activities"[18]. Special attention was given to the spreading of "fascist" ideologies, which was explicitly forbidden[19].

Generally speaking, media outlets were banned from spreading information that is "falsified", "defaming" or "misrepresenting ongoing affairs"[20]. In addition, the authorities prohibited criticism of the existence and legality of the Donetsk People's Republic and its leadership[21], "collaborating with the enemy"[22], passing on information to

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[15] Constitution, art. 22; Statute on the Accreditation of Journalists by the People's Council of the Donetsk People's Republic, art. 1.2, 7; On State Secrets, art. 7; On mass media, art. 3; 57; On personal data, art. 6.8; On information and information technologies, art. 12.3, Penal code, art. 149.

[16] Constitution, art. 22.2; On the legalisation of the activities of media outlets and the rules for the production and dissemination of information in the Donetsk People's Republic, clause VIII; On counteracting extremist activities, art. 1.1A; On mass media, art. 4.1; On the definition of authorised bodies in the field of granting military accreditation and approval of the Rules for granting military accreditation to representatives of the media in the territory of the Donetsk People's Republic, art. 7.1.4; 7.2.

[17] On counteracting terrorism, art. 2, 27; On counteracting extremist activities, art. 1; On mass media, art. 4.1; On personal data, art. 10.8; On information and information technologies, art. 12.1.

[18] On counteracting extremist activities; On mass media, art. 4.1; On information and information technologies, art. 12.1; On the protection of children from information harmful to their health and development, art. 5.2; On the establishment of an Interdepartmental Commission on suspending the publication of media and the approval of regulations on the Interdepartmental Commission on suspending the publication of media, art. 25.

[19] On counteracting extremist activities, art. 1B; On the protection of children from information harmful to their health and development, art. 5.2.

[20] On the legalisation of the activities of media outlets and the rules for the production and dissemination of information in the Donetsk People's Republic, clause XIX; Statute on the Accreditation of Journalists by the People's Council of the Donetsk People's Republic, art. 9; On information and information technologies, art. 12.2; On the definition of authorised bodies in the field of granting military accreditation and approval of the rules for granting military accreditation to representatives of the media in the territory of the Donetsk People's Republic, art. 7.1.1, 7.1.2.

[21] Statute on the Accreditation of Journalists by the People's Council of the Donetsk People's Republic, art. 9, 10.

[22] On the protection of children from information harmful to their health and development, art. 5.2.

"unauthorised" persons not working in media[23], propagandising "non-traditional sexual relationships"[24], and spreading information about organisations or groups that were outlawed in the Donetsk People's Republic[25]. Finally, there existed a ban on conducting "electoral agitation"[26].

Not only the production of, but also the access to certain types of information was restricted by law. The "Law on Mass Media" states that "a restriction of access to information is established by the laws of the [DNR], in order to protect the foundations of the constitutional order, morality, health, rights and legitimate interests of others, [and] ensure the Republic's defence and security."[27]. The edict "On the approval of a list containing the official information to which access is restricted", issued by the Ministry of Information, reaffirms these restrictions[28]. State and regulatory bodies were thus authorised to limit or prohibit the dissemination of certain types of information in order to prevent DNR residents from gaining access to it.

Furthermore, all journalists and media outlets have had to undergo a registration procedure before they were allowed to operate inside the DNR. Until the moment they received their accreditation, they were not considered a media outlet and therefore not authorised to publish materials[29]. This registration procedure was updated regularly after first being instated on June 23 of 2014, approximately two months and a half after the start of hostilities.

In addition, so-called "special legal regimes" could be imposed at the behest of the Head of the DNR. Under such regimes, certain constitutional rights are limited, and extra restrictions are placed on the flow of information. Specifically, the "Law on Special Regimes" states that authorities may "restrict the freedom of the press and other media

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[23] On the definition of authorised bodies in the field of granting military accreditation and approval of the rules for granting military accreditation to representatives of the media in the territory of the Donetsk People's Republic, art. 7.1.3.
[24] On the protection of children from information harmful to their health and development, art. 5.2.
[25] On mass media, art. 4.2.
[26] Ibid., art. 59.
[27] On information and information technologies, art. 9.1.
[28] On the approval of a list containing the official information to which access is restricted, the administrator of which is the Ministry of Information of the Donetsk People's Republic.
[29] On the legalisation of the activities of media outlets and the rules for the production and dissemination of information in the Donetsk People's Republic, Clause IV, VII, XIV, XVI; Statute on the Accreditation of Journalists by the People's Council of the Donetsk People's Republic; On special legal regimes, art. 14; Rules for obtaining accreditation for work in the territory of the DNR by representatives of the media and a new form of accreditation certificate; On the approval of the rules for the accreditation of journalists of mass media outlets registered in the Donetsk People's Republic, art. 6.1, 9; On the establishment of rules of accreditation for foreign journalists and technical employees of foreign mass media outlets on the territory of the Donetsk People's Republic; On the definition of authorised bodies in the field of granting military accreditation and approval of the Rules for granting military accreditation to representatives of the media in the territory of the Donetsk People's Republic.

through the introduction of preliminary censorship, [having indicated] the conditions and procedure for its implementation, as well as temporarily confiscate printed matter, radio transmissions, sound equipment, equipment used for [the] duplication [of documents], and establish a special procedure for accrediting journalists"[30]. No laws were passed that formally cemented a state of martial law, unlike in the Luhansk People's Republic (see next section). Nonetheless, through these "special legal regimes", the authorities reserved the right to seize media outlets' property and suspend their activities without legal recourse.

Defamation was made a criminal rather than a civil offence[31]. The term ("kleveta" in Russian) is defined as follows: "the dissemination of knowingly false information that discredits the honour and dignity of another person or undermines his reputation". Punishment for a defamation conviction could range from a fine to compulsory labour, and was more severe if done in public or in the mass media. The vagueness embedded in the above definition left a degree of leeway for authorities to determine what does and what does not constitute defamation.

Finally, the authorities instated celebrations of and awards for journalists who operate within established guidelines. This was done by establishing a public holiday, "with the purpose of promoting the professional creative activity of journalists in the territory of the Donetsk People's Republic, promoting the establishment and realisation of the freedom of mass information, strengthening the guarantees of citizens' right to promptly receive comprehensive and reliable information through electronic and printed media, forming a culture of honest and free journalism based on generally recognised principles of professional conduct and ethics, protecting journalists' rights and freedoms, their economic and professional creativity, their interests surrounding copyright and related rights, their honour, dignity and reputation to attract public attention, strengthening public confidence in printed and electronic media, and enhancing the social role of journalists and journalism"[32]. This holiday was celebrated on May 5 of each year.

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[30] On Special Legal Regimes, art. 14.
[31] Penal Code of the DNR, art. 132.
[32] On the establishment of the working holiday "Day of workers in media and printing in the Donetsk People's Republic".

Authorities in the DNR thus established a number of laws and regulations that constrain media freedom inside the territories under their control. While lip service was paid to the prohibition of censorship and the rights and freedoms of journalists and citizens to express themselves and freely disseminate and receive information, regulations were such that DNR authorities were legally allowed to crack down on dissent. This not only included the accreditation process (which is mandatory for all journalists and media outlets and runs through the central administration), but also the authorisation to close down any media that criticise or challenge the legality, morals, war effort, cultural values or leadership of the DNR (so-called "opinion crimes").

2.4 Media legislation in the LNR

As in Donetsk, lawmakers in Luhansk were careful to pay lip service to freedom of speech, freedom of the press, governmental accountability, and freedom of creativity and thought[33]. Censorship was forbidden by the Constitution[34] as well as by the "Law on Mass Media"[35], albeit with the caveat that this was the case "except in cases provided for by law". In addition, the "rights of journalists" were guaranteed (including the right to "seek, receive and impart information; to obtain access to documents and materials; to make records; and to verify the reliability of information"[36]).

These official protections notwithstanding, lawmakers imposed explicit limitations on press freedom since the start of the conflict. The Constitution, first of all, forbade "the activity of organisations propagating violence, fascism, and nationalism"[37]. Similar prohibitions, mainly against "extremism" and "terrorism", were present in other legal documents[38]. These terms remained largely undefined, except in "On the foundations of counteracting terrorism"[39], where terrorism is defined as "an ideology of violence, as well as the practice of influencing decision-making by state authorities, local governments or international organisations related to the intimidation of the population and/or other forms of unlawful violent actions". Enough leeway remained for authorities to use a relatively loose definition of terrorism that does not necessarily include the use or planned use of violence. Another restriction on what type of information was allowed to be published can be found in the "Law on the Committee of State Security of the Luhansk People's Republic"[40], which states that "persons assisting the bodies of the State Security Committee are required […] not to allow the deliberate provision of biased, incomplete, false or defamatory information." Special attention was paid to "electoral agitation"[41]: journalists were subject to a "prohibition on conducting electoral

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[33] Constitution, art. 22; Law on Mass Media, art. 3, 65, 67, 72; On state secrets, art. 7; On personal data, art. 4.2, 6; On information, information technology and the protection of information, Art. 5, 7, 12.3; On the procedure for reporting on the activities of public authorities in the state media, art. 4.
[34] Constitution, art. 22.
[35] Law on Mass Media, art. 3.
[36] Law on Mass Media, art. 56, 77; On the procedure for reporting on the activities of public authorities in the state media, art. 4; Penal code, art. 156.
[37] Constitution, art. 9.4.
[38] Law on Mass Media, art. 4; On personal data, art. 10.8; On protecting children from information that is harmful to their health and development, art. 5; penal code, art. 340, 341, 342, 344, 437; On the foundations of counteracting terrorism, art. 4.
[39] art. 4
[40] Law on the Committee of State Security of the Luhansk People's Republic, art. 26.
[41] Law on Mass Media, art. 67.10.

agitation, or agitation on issues surrounding referenda, while carrying out [their] professional activities."

Aside from the above, there also existed restrictions on the access to information, similar to the DNR. First, the "Law on information, information technology and the protection of information" states that "restriction of access to information is established by the legislation of the [LNR] in order to protect the foundations of constitutional order, morality, health, rights and the legitimate interests of others, and ensure the country's defence and security"[42].

Second, again like in Donetsk, journalists were only allowed to operate and work inside the LNR if they obtained an accreditation issued by the authorities. Article 9 of the "Law on Mass Media" states that:

> the editorial staff of a mass medium can start carrying out its activities after its registration, except in cases of exemption from registration provided for by this law. A web site on the information and telecommunications network 'Internet' can be registered as a network publication, in accordance with this law. A site on the internet that is not registered as a mass medium is not a mass media outlet.

This line is repeated in article 72, specifically within the context of television channels. Special attention is paid to online media outlets. The law "on information, information technology and the protection of information" states that online media (including bloggers) are obliged to put their "name, location and address, and e-mail address" on their website[43]. Online media outlets were required to notify state regulatory bodies of their existence[44] (the same goes for bloggers[45]), and to store information on the "reception, transmission, delivery and/or processing of vocal information, written text, images, sounds or other electronic messages of internet users within the territory of the Luhansk People's Republic for at least six months from the moment of the end of

[42] Law on information, information technology and the protection of information, art. 9.1.
[43] Law information, information technology and the protection of information, art. 10.2.
[44] Law on Mass Media, art. 11.2 and 11.5.
[45] Ibid., art. 12.5.

the implementation of such actions". The above did not apply to operators of state-run media[46].

The situation was slightly different for foreign media outlets and journalists. People and organisations that spoke out "disparagingly" about the LNR were denied accreditation[47], indicating that there was a verification system in place to check such practices. Restrictions placed on an individual journalist extended to the organisation for which he or she worked. If a journalist lost their accreditation (for whatever reason), the authorities were allowed to repeal their employer's accreditation for up to 6 months. Furthermore, the share of foreign ownership of media outlets was restricted to a maximum of 20%[48].

Third, there is the issue of martial law. Ten days after the passing of the LNR constitution on May 18 of 2014, the authorities issued a declaration imposing martial law in the regions under its control. Measures were taken to "control the work of communication enterprises, printing enterprises, publishing houses, television and radio organisations, theatrical, concert and entertainment and other enterprises, cultural institutions and organisations; to use local radio stations, television centres and printing houses for military needs and to conduct explanatory work among military personnel and the general population"[49]. Authorities also reserved the right to confiscate any equipment that may be used for creating or disseminating information, including computers, video and audio equipment, et cetera[50]. Martial law was codified into law in 2015. From then on, the activities of opposition political parties and other organisations were suspended, rallies and demonstrations were restricted, and military censorship was imposed over postal items and messages transmitted through telecommunications systems[51].

Fourth, censorship and media regulation were gradually extended into the online sphere. Beginning in late 2015, the authorities moved to actively begin banning

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[46] Ibid., art. 11.7.
[47] Ibid., art. 17.
[48] Ibid. Law on Mass Media, art. 22.
[49] See: On the Declaration of Martial Law, art. 15.8.
[50] Ibid., art. 15.9.
[51] Ibid., art. 7.

websites from operating inside the LNR[52]. By 2017, this list contained more than 350 websites of local, domestic as well as foreign origin, with new sites being added at regular intervals.

Fifth, defamation, as in the DNR, was a criminal rather than a civil offence[53]. The same definition of "defamation" is used as in the DNR, namely "the dissemination of deliberately false information, that discredits the honour and dignity of another person or undermines his reputation." The penal codes of the DNR and LNR differed very little on this topic. In the LNR, defamation, broadly defined, carried a fine or compulsory labour. Punishment was heavier when the crime occurred through a mass medium or in a public display.

Sixth, the authorities promoted friendly journalists who complied with regulations and produced output that was amenable to the state and its regulatory bodies. This development, however, only started in January 2017[54]. Particularly journalists whose "professional achievements and active position contribute[d] to the development of the LNR" were rewarded.

While there were a few protections in place that can be said to formally guarantee the rights of journalists to operate within the LNR, media freedom, in practice, did not exist between 2014 and late 2017. The restrictions placed on journalists have been such that the publication of material construed as going against the will of the authorities was prevented through a number of regulations and laws. Non-compliant media was relatively easy to outlaw, either by refusing accreditation or by outright banning them from operating inside LNR territory. Additionally, the legal embedding of "opinion crimes", censorship and arbitrary defamation laws further ensured a constricted media landscape.

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[52] Law on the prohibition of the dissemination of information from information websites, which disseminate information that is against the law of the LNR; Law on information, information technology and the protection of information, art. 10, 11, 12.
[53] Penal code of the LNR, art. 139.
[54] On the approval of the regulations on the contest for journalists of the LNR, 10-1-2017 and 13-6-2017.

2.5 Discussion

In this section, I will compare the regulatory landscapes of the DNR and LNR. First, I will go into textual similarities that are visible mostly on the surface, such as the names of laws and regulations, as well as in terms of phrasing and wording. Next, I will look at the content in more detail and draw a number of distinctions. Finally, I will place this analysis within the context of the five models of the press.

2.5.1 Textual similarities

The legislative similarities between the two statelets are readily apparent. A significant number of laws have the same name, and many clauses and articles are direct copies of one another (excluding cosmetic changes such as proper names and titles). Statutes, bylaws and rulings differ to a significant extent between the two territories, and as such cannot be compared on a textual or linguistic basis. Laws, however, are in many respects almost identical.

Additionally, a number of them are also highly similar to laws that were passed by the State Duma of the Russian Federation. In some cases, LNR and DNR laws are almost word-for-word copies of their Russian counterparts. Table 5 (on the next page) lists all laws pertaining to the regulation of the mass media in the DNR, LNR, and the Russian Federation (RF). Similar (or identical) laws are listed in the same row. If no similar or identical law exists, its closest mirror has been added to the list (this could be a decree or statute instead of a law, for example). If there is no similar law or other type of legislation, the box is left blank.

The three columns on the right list the percentage of words that are similar between two documents. For example, "% Similarity DNR - RF" means the percentage of words shared between the DNR version and the Russian version of that law. The percentages listed include cosmetic changes as well, meaning that the actual similarity between two documents is higher than the percentages listed in table 5[55].

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[55] I do not compare DNR and LNR legislation to its Ukrainian equivalents. This would be a useful exercise, but it is not possible due to technical limitations. The tool used in table 1 relies on the language being the same. Ukrainian legislation is available in Russian, but only in translation from Ukrainian. Thus, while there may be some overlap in terms of content, it is likely that the comparison is skewed by differences in syntax and vocabulary, thus rendering the comparison less than accurate.

Name - Donetsk People's Republic	Name - Luhansk People's Republic	Name - Russian Federation	%Sim. DNR-LNR	%Sim. DNR-RF	%Sim. LNR-RF
Constitution	Constitution	Constitution	58.4%	19.7%	18.2%
On state secrets	On state secrets	On state secrets[1]	71.5%	72.8%	68.0%
On gatherings, meetings, demonstrations, actions and picketings		On gatherings, meetings, demonstrations, actions and picketings[2]		61.5%	
On special legal regimes	On the declaration of martial law	On martial law[3]	57.0%	57.0%	57.0%
On counter- acting terrorism	On the foundations of counter- acting terrorism	On counteracting terrorism[4]	39.3%	44.2%	6.9%
On counteracting extremist activities		On counteracting extremist activities[5]		64.1%	
On mass media	On mass media	On mass media[6]	58.1%	62.5%	67.5%
On personal data	On personal data	On personal data[7]	58.4%	73.3%	52.4%
On information and information technologies	On information, information technologies and protection of information	On information, information technologies and the protection of information[8]	57.1%	36.9%	47.5%
On radio frequency resources[9]					
On the protection of children from information harmful to their health and development	On the protection of children from information harmful to their health and development	On the protection of children from information harmful to their health and development[10]	64.9%	65.4%	50.2%
Decree nr. 6-5: On the implementation of martial law	On the declaration of martial law	On martial law[11]			57.0%
Working meeting "Patriotic education of citizens of the Donetsk People's Republic"[12]	On the system of patriotic education of citizens of the Luhansk People's Republic	Decree On the state programme "Patriotic education of citizens of the Russian Federation"[13]			
First reading: On the procedure for reporting on the activities of government bodies and local governments in state media[14]	On the procedure for reporting on the activities of public authorities in state media	On the procedure for reporting on the activities of public authorities in state media[15]			34.2%

Table 5: Comparison between laws (zakony) regulating the mass media in the DNR, LNR and Russian Federation. The three columns on the right list the percentage of words that two documents have in common. Numbers ([1], [2] et cetera) indicate supplementary information, which can be found in the End Notes section at the end of this chapter.

There are a number of takeaways from table 5. First, the following laws passed by both the DNR and LNR authorities are to a large extent copies of Russian legislation:

- "On state secrets"
- "On mass media"
- "On personal data"
- "On information and information technologies (and the protection of information)"
- "On the protection of children from information harmful to their health and development"

All these laws have high percentages of similarity (between 36.9% and 73.3%). As mentioned previously, the actual similarity is higher than the percentages listed here because cosmetic changes are also counted as differences. To a lesser extent, the laws called "On counteracting extremism" also share a significant percentage of words. The similarities between the DNR and LNR versions of this law (39.3% and the DNR and Russian versions (44.2%) are rather high, while the similarity between the LNR and Russian versions is low (6.2%). Furthermore, the DNR, LNR, and the Russian Federation have all at some point proposed a programme entitled "on the patriotic education of citizens", albeit in three different forms (meaning that no automatic similarity check is possible). In addition, the constitutions of the LNR and DNR are quite similar to each other (58.4% overlap) and approximately one fifth of their content is copied from the constitution of the Russian Federation (18.2% and 19.7%, respectively).

Also noteworthy is the majority of the above laws have exactly the same names, except in three cases: first, the DNR has two slightly different names for the laws "On information and information technologies and the protection of information" (from which it removed "on the protection of information") and "On the procedure for reporting on the activities of government bodies in the state media", to which it adds "and local governments". The LNR has a slightly different name for "On counteracting extremism", which it calls "On the foundations of counteracting extremism".

Second, the DNR passed a number of laws that are very similar to legislation in the Russian Federation that the LNR has not (yet) adopted. These are "On gatherings, meetings, demonstrations, actions and picketings" (61.5%) and "On counteracting extremist activities" (64.1%).

Third, the LNR also passed a few laws that share a high number of words with Russian legislation that the DNR authorities have not (or not yet) passed, or have different versions for. These are "On special regimes" (57%), "On the declaration of martial law" (57%) and "On the procedure for reporting on the activities of public authorities in the state media" (34.2%).

The conclusion from these surface-level similarities is not that the legislative framework for mass media is the same in the DNR, LNR and the Russian Federation. Rather, DNR and LNR lawmakers made use of already existent Russian laws to draft their own legislation, whether for the sake of convenience or out of genuine agreement with its content. Additionally, there were also instances of DNR and LNR lawmakers copying from each other (such as the constitutions). It seems logical that practical reasons may have underlied this process; for example, the requirements needed for regulating the media in the DNR and LNR may have been perceived to be quite similar to Russia's, and as such there was no need to write entirely new laws that, in essence, had similar goals. Furthermore, the persons responsible for drafting legislation may have lacked experience, skills or manpower, and therefore elected to make use of already existing frameworks.

2.5.2 Similarities in content

There are many similarities between the LNR and DNR in terms of what media outlets, journalists and media consumers were and were not allowed to do. First, both territories paid lip service to freedom of speech, thought, and the press. Both constitutions and their respective laws on mass media repeatedly and explicitly mention that these freedoms are guaranteed and that censorship is prohibited, despite the broad range of limitations that impair their proliferation (see below). At least in strictly formal terms, however, journalists could refer to a number of legal documents affirming their right to operate.

Second, the DNR and LNR imposed highly similar limits on freedom of speech and the press. These limitations include "opinion crimes", or prohibitions on disseminating information that justifies or propagates "terrorism", "extremist activities" or "Nazism". In both the DNR and LNR, the law employed a rather loose definition of these terms (especially of "extremist activities"). Furthermore, in both the DNR and LNR the law forbade challenging or disparaging the republics' "territorial integrity", national honour, and leadership. There was also a prohibition on the dissemination of "false", "biased", "incomplete" or "defamatory" information. Access to information was also restricted in both territories.

Another similarity can be found in the obligation to obtain an accreditation in order to work as a journalist or media outlet. While this obligation, in itself, does not constitute a necessary limitation to media freedom[56], the regulations in both territories were such that the accreditation system could be used as a mechanism to ensure only "loyal" journalists were permitted to work. It also appears (although this is not explicitly stated) that there was a verification system in place that checked if journalists made disparaging or negative references to the DNR and/or LNR prior to their accreditation request.

Third, both statelets imposed regulations that place the media under a regime of martial law (or "special legal regimes" as the DNR calls it). Under these conditions, authorities may impose direct censorship, confiscate media outlets' equipment, and suspend the activities of specific organisations. Martial law, more than any other laws or regulations, thus gave shape to a regulatory landscape that prevented the media from operating without restrictions.

Fourth, both the DNR and LNR authorities provided incentives to obedient media by way of public holidays dedicated to (accredited) members of the press and contests that rewarded journalists whose "professional achievements and active position have contributed to the development" of the republics.

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[56] Freedom House, "Freedom of the Press 2017 Methodology."

2.5.3 Differences

While there are not many substantial differences between the legislative frameworks of the DNR and LNR, some distinctions between them can be made. The first difference is found in their respective constitutions. The constitution of the DNR states that "censorship is prohibited" (article 22). The constitution of the LNR states the same (also under article 22), with the addition "except in cases provided for by law". The reason for this addition is unclear, but since the constitution of the LNR was passed after the DNR's and is, to a large extent, a direct copy of it (see table 5), there is an indication that LNR authorities formalised the possibility of censorship earlier on in the deliberative process of drafting legislation.

The second difference can be found in the penal code. Article 437.3 of the penal code of the LNR states that "expressing obvious disrespect to society with regards to information about days of military glory and memorable dates of the LNR related to the protection of the Fatherland, as well as the desecration of the symbols of the military glory of the LNR, committed publicly, are punishable by fine." Article 425 of the penal code of the DNR states the same, word for word, except that it explicitly mentions the Russian Federation alongside the DNR, whereas the LNR mentions only the LNR. Since the penal code of the LNR was passed by its People's Council almost one year after the DNR passed its own (19 August 2014 versus 14 August 2015), LNR legislators must have deliberately removed any mention of the Russian Federation in this article. This removal may be one sign of a difference in how the respective LNR and DNR authorities approached their relationship with the Russian Federation.

Third, two laws were passed by the People's Council of the DNR that were not adopted or even deliberated by the People's Council of the LNR. These are "On gatherings, meetings, demonstrations, actions and pickets" and "On counteracting extremist activities". Both laws placed additional restrictions on freedom of the press, organisation, demonstration and speech, on top of the already existing ones. They were also copied, to a large extent, from Russian laws by the same name (see table 5). However, the fact that the LNR did not adopt these laws does not necessarily imply a large difference in terms of the regulations both republics put in place. As explained in the previous section, the DNR and LNR imposed similar restrictions on the

organisation of demonstrations and gatherings, media freedom, and on countering "extremism".

Fourth, the LNR codified martial law into law, whereas the DNR had it only by decree. In theory, this means that martial law was more permanent in the LNR than in the DNR. While both statelets imposed very similar restrictions on the flow of information by way of martial law, it can be argued that the LNR was slightly stricter, whereas the DNR, at least officially, considered the state of martial law to be temporary in nature.

Fifth, in terms of regulating the internet, the DNR was less openly restrictive than the LNR. Most importantly, the DNR did not have a list of blocked websites comparable in size to the list of more than 350 sites blocked by the LNR[57], although it did have a registry with forbidden organisations according to the law "On counteracting extremist activities"[58]. Organisations on this list included Ukrainian nationalist organisations and political parties, pro-Ukrainian fighter battalions ("Aidar" and "Azov", chiefly), and Islamic terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaida, the Taliban, Islamic State and Jabhat Al-Nusra. The DNR also published a list of "extremist materials" that were banned by the High Court of the DNR. These include individual Vkontakte pages of political and social movements (such as the radical pro-Ukrainian group "Pravyi Sektor"), books on Ukrainian nationalism, audio files, images, and Islamic and Christian religious brochures[59]. Nonetheless, the DNR did not maintain an officially sanctioned list of blocked or forbidden websites, nor did there appear to be any ongoing attempt to crack down on internet activity in the same way as occurred in the LNR.

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[57] Ministerstvo Informatsii Pechati i Massovykh Kommunikatsii Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki, "O Zaprete Rasprostraneniia Informatsii S Informatsionnykh Saitov, Rasprostroniaiushchikh Informatsiiu S Narusheniem Zakonodatel'stva Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki," Pub. L. No. 30 (2015), https://sovminlnr.ru/docs/30.12.2015/1.pdf.
[58] Retrieved from: http://dnr-online.ru/perechen-zapreshhennyx-obshhestvennyx-i-religioznyx-obedinenij-inyx-organizacij/
[59] Retrieved from: http://www.minjust-dnr.ru/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/SPISOK-EKSTR.-MATERIALOV-na-01.08.2017.pdf

2.5.4 DNR/LNR media legislation and models of the press

In the introduction to this chapter, I defined 5 categories of criteria for assessing to what extent existing legislation allows for media freedom. It is useful to recall these categories here, and address how DNR and LNR legislation fare under them based on the analysis from the previous sections:

- *Legal protections:* In both territories, journalists and media producers enjoyed little protection against infringement on their rights. Aside from lip service to "freedom of the press" in some laws and regulations and the official prohibition on censorship, there was no legislation that explicitly protected journalists from repercussions. In addition, there is no indication that journalists could seek legal redress against any grievances they may have experienced.

- *Opinion crimes:* Criticism of the DNR and LNR leadership was explicitly forbidden by law. In addition, there were prohibitions against propagating certain opinions and viewpoints about a myriad of issues, including the military conflict, the legitimacy of the DNR and LNR state-building projects, as well as social issues such as "non-traditional sexual relationships". The range of opinions that was allowed to be expressed was thus severely limited by the authorities.

- *Accreditation:* All journalists working in the DNR and LNR had to undergo a strict accreditation procedure. In both territories, this procedure looked at past work by the applying journalist, and if this work was deemed to go against the interests of the DNR or LNR authorities, accreditation would be denied. Obtaining permission to work as a journalist in the DNR and LNR was therefore arbitrarily difficult and regulated from the top.

- *Defamation or libel:* Both terms are mentioned in the DNR and LNR's respective penal codes, but they were loosely defined and open to interpretation. Furthermore, penalties for expressing allegedly defamatory or libellous opinions through a mass communication channel were higher than for doing so in private. Defamation and libel laws were thus written in such a way that they could be applied arbitrarily.

- *Censorship:* While censorship was officially prohibited in both territories, the presence of martial law and numerous other regulations explicitly limiting the expression of certain opinions rendered these provisions effectively void.

We may also recall the five models of the press as defined by Siebert and his colleagues[60] and Tolz and Teper[61]: authoritarian, neo-authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and ideological. Based on the above, neither the DNR nor the LNR authorities employed the libertarian or social responsibility model. The legislation does not show that the authorities viewed the individual as responsible for obtaining his or her own information, nor do we see that the press was allowed to self-regulate or exercise responsibility towards society. Second, both the DNR and the LNR explicitly imposed censorship, for example through the imposition of martial law, the banning of domestic and foreign news outlets, and the prohibition on expressing certain ideas (e.g. about "non-traditional sexual relationships"). This censorship, along with the direct oppression of media by damaging editorial offices, shutting down Ukrainian television channels, et cetera, leads to the conclusion that the DNR and LNR authorities did not follow the neo-authoritarian model, unlike, for example, the Russian Federation[62]. Despite the fact that a significant chunk of media legislation in the DNR and LNR was a direct copy of Russian legislation, the limitations imposed on journalists in the DNR and LNR were far stricter than in Russia.

This leaves us with either the authoritarian or the ideological model. The key difference between the two, according to Siebert and colleagues, is the ideological element: where the authoritarian model does not necessarily pressure journalists to promote a certain idea or set of ideals, the ideological model is explicit in its assertion that the role of the press is to help propel society towards some desired ideological goal. What we therefore need to look for in DNR and LNR media legislation is the presence of such an ideology, and whether the media is mobilised to promote it.

On the one hand, there is no explicit mention in any of the 58 legal documents analysed in this chapter of a certain ideology or set of political ideals that are to be promoted. The documents in the data set do not describe a "national" ideology that journalists were supposed to adhere to. On the other hand, some ideologies and ideals are explicitly mentioned as running counter to the DNR and LNR's governing philosophy: "Fascism", "Nazism", Ukrainian nationalism and "non-traditional sexual relationships"

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[60] Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press: The Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility and Soviet Communist Concepts of What the Press Should Be and Do.*
[61] Tolz and Teper, "Broadcasting Agitainment: A New Media Strategy of Putin's Third Presidency."
[62] Ibid.

(which in Russian media is often used as a stand-in for European-style liberalism[63]) are all mentioned as anathema to DNR and LNR interests and values. Thus, while not explicitly described, there is a set of ideals that the mass media was mobilised to work *against*, rather than promote. The initiation of "national" holidays celebrating journalists whose "professional achievements and active position contribute to the development of the [Luhansk and Donetsk] People's Republic[64]" and the assertion that "patriotism and readiness to serve the Fatherland [are the] most important values in the minds and feelings of citizens; the active use of elements and ideas of patriotic education in the media in the process of educational activities […], with the active participation of social and state institutions, [must be promoted][65]" are examples of such a strategy. But it is important to note that while there is a prescriptive element to how the authorities viewed the role of the mass media in the "patriotic education" of DNR and LNR citizens, the prescriptions themselves were not specific as to what to educate the citizenry about; the "elements and ideas of patriotic education" were not specified, and ideological underpinnings of the patriotism that was to be promoted were lacking.

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[63] See: Nikita Slepcov, "Political Homophobia as a State Strategy in Russia," *Journal of Global Initiatives* 12, no. 1 (2017): 140–61.
[64] On the approval of the regulations on the contest for journalists of the LNR, 10-1-2017 and 13-6-2017.
[65] On the protection of children from information that is harmful to their health and development, art. 15.

2.6 Conclusion

Controlling the media was an immediate priority for the DNR and LNR authorities. Already in May 2014, weeks after taking control of the Donetsk and Luhansk regional administrations, the authorities began to pass laws and regulations aimed at controlling media content production. Inspired by legislation previously adopted by the Russian State Duma, both the DNR and LNR developed a regulatory landscape in which a free press, critical of the authorities, was not permitted to exist. While a number of differences can be discerned between the two territories, restrictions on the mass media were broadly similar. Additionally, both territories underwent a development in which the media landscape became more rather than less restrictive over time.

In all five categories for assessing media legislation frameworks – legal protections, opinion crimes, accreditation, defamation, and censorship – the DNR and LNR authorities adopted a restrictive approach, despite a number of protections (such as the formal prohibition of censorship) that would theoretically allow for a pluralistic media landscape. These formal protections, however, were effectively nullified by other legislation, although they were never officially revoked. Legal protections of journalists and media outlets were barebones; opinion crimes such as criticism of the DNR and LNR leadership could be found in numerous laws and regulations; accreditation procedures were complicated and allowed for arbitrary exclusion; defamation laws used a non-specific definition of "libel'"; and censorship was formalised through the presence of martial law and other regulations.

The DNR and LNR authorities' focus on controlling the media through legislation shows that attention was paid to building political and legal legitimacy from the start. The establishment of formal legislative and governmental institutions described in chapter 1, and the authorities' actively repressive approach to controlling the media, indicates that the necessary structures were put into place to pursue an identity project. The authorities went through all the motions that budding states would explore in the first stages of state building. But from this chapter's analysis of the DNR and LNR's media legislation, it becomes clear that an identity project was never articulated. The "model of the press" employed by both the DNR and LNR authorities was a hybrid between authoritarian and ideological, with a heavy focus on top-down control of media

production and a degree of ideological enforcement. Wherever ideology was mentioned, however, legislation focused on the question of what ideologies are banned, rather than what ideology was promoted. In other words, the authorities sought to build a belief system, but one devoid of a genealogy. In the next three chapters, I will investigate this phenomenon further by focusing specifically on media content. Having established the ways in which DNR and LNR authorities have sought to exercise control over the media, I now turn to the dynamics of these media discourses themselves.

2.7 End notes

This section contains supplementary information about table 5 in this chapter.

[1] Gosudarstvennaia Duma Rossiskoi Federatsii, "Zakon RF 'O Gosudarstvennoi Taine' ot 2 1.07.1993 N 5485-1 (Posledniaia Redaktsiia)," Pub. L. No. 5485–1 (1993), http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_2481/.

[2] Gosudarstvennaia Duma Rossiskoi Federatsii, "Federal'nyi Zakon O Sobraniiakh, Mitingakh, Demonstratiiakh, Shestviiakh I Piketirovaniiakh" (2004), http://www.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc&base=LAW&n=217909&fld=134&dst=1000000001,0&rnd=0.9687883385724382#0.

[3] Gosudarstvennaia Duma Rossiskoi Federatsii, "Federal'nyi Konstitutsionnyi Zakon O Voennom Polozhenii" (2002), http://www.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc&base=LAW&n=219110&fld=134&dst=1000000001,0&rnd=0.07104764548264741#0.

[4] Gosudarstvennaia Duma Rossiskoi Federatsii, "Federal'nyi Zakon O Protivodeistvii Terrorizmu" (2006), http://www.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc&base=LAW&n=203355&fld=134&dst=1000000001,0&rnd=0.6285770899563974#0.

[5] Gosudarstvennaia Duma Rossiskoi Federatsii, "Federal'nyi Zakon "o Protivodeistvii Ekstremistskoi Deiatel'nosti" (2002), http://to16.minjust.ru/ru/federalnyy-zakon-o-protivodeystvii-ekstremistskoy-deyatelnosti.

[6] Gosudarstvennaia Duma Rossiskoi Federatsii, "Zakon RF Ot 27.12.1991 N 2124- (Red. Ot 06.06.2019) 'O Sredstvakh Massovoi Informatsii'" (1991).

[7] Gosudarstvennaia Duma Rossiskoi Federatsii, "Federal'nyi Zakon O Personal'nykh Dannykh" (2006), http://www.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc&base=LAW&n=221444&fld=134&dst=1000000001,0&rnd=0.5619070867277615#0.

[8] Gosudarstvennaia Duma Rossiskoi Federatsii, "Federal'nyi Zakon Ob Informatsii, Informatsionnykh Tekhnologiiakh I O Zashchite Informatsii" (2006), http://www.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc&base=LAW&n=221387&fld=134&dst=1000000001,0&rnd=0.8177155918613211#0.

[9] While there is no LNR or Russian equivalent of this law, there does exist a Ukrainian law by the same name. See: Zakonodavstvo Ukraïny, "Pro Radiochastotnii Resurs Ukraïny" (2000).

[10] Gosudarstvennaia Duma Rossiskoi Federatsii, "Federal'nyi zakon 'O Zashchite Detei Ot Informatsii, Prichiniaiushchei Vred Ikh Zdorov'iu I Razvitiiu'" (2010), http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_108808/.

[11] Gosudarstvennaia Duma Rossiskoi Federatsii, Federal'nyi konstitutsionnyi zakon o voennom polozhenii.

[12] Ministerstvo Zdravookhraneniia Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki, "Rabochee soveshchanie 'Patrioticheskoe Vospitanie Grazhdan Dnoetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki,'" *Www.mzdnr.ru*, September 26, 2016, http://mzdnr.ru/news/rabochee-soveshchanie-patrioticheskoe-vospitanie-grazhdan-doneckoy-narodnoy-respubliki.

[13] Pravitel'stvo Rossiiskoi Federatsii, "Postanovlenie O Gosudarstvennoi programme 'Patrioticheskoe Vospitanie Grazhdan Rossiiskoi Federatsii Na 2016-2020 Gody'" (2015), http://static.government.ru/media/files/8qqYUwwzHUxzVkH1jsKAErrx2dE4q0ws.pdf.

[14] Was never written into law, but was passed in first reading on March 18, 2016. See: Narodnyi Sovet Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki, "Zalozheny Pravovye Osnovy Poriadka Osveshceniia Deiatel'nosti Organov Gosudarstvennoi Vlasti v SMI," *Www.dnrsovet.su*, March 18, 2016, https://dnrsovet.su/zalozheny-pravovye-osnovy-poryadka-osveshheniya-deyatelnosti-organov-gosudarstvennoj-vlasti-v-smi/.

[15] Gosudarstvennaia Duma Rossiskoi Federatsii, "Federal'nyi Zakon O Poriadke Osveshcheniia Deiatel'nosti Organov Gosudarstvennoi Vlasti v Gosudarstvennykh Sredstvakh Massovoi Informatsii" (1994), http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102033849&rdk=&backlink=1.

3 Local media and identity before, during and after the occupation of Kramatorsk

3.1 Introduction

I begin my discussion of the content of media discourses in the DNR and LNR with an illustrative contextual example: Kramatorsk, a city in the northern part of Donetsk Oblast in eastern Ukraine with a population of approximately 160.000 that fell under DNR and LNR occupation before returning to Ukrainian control months later. Founded as a small settlement by a minor railway station in the 1860s, the town gradually grew into a large urban centre with heavy industry as its main source of economic activity. Over the years, Kramatorsk became one of the most economically vibrant cities in Donbas. The Kramatorsk machine building plant (NKMZ) designs and builds equipment for mining, metallurgy, steel rolling and military-grade heavy weaponry. The city's metallurgical plant provided employment to thousands of residents until its closure in 2012.

On April 12 2014, armed militiamen captured Kramatorsk's police station, airfield and city council building. For the next few months, the city was occupied by representatives of the DNR, with parts of it changing hands periodically, until it was recaptured by the Ukrainian army on July 5[1]. After returning to Ukrainian-controlled territory, it became the de facto administrative centre of Donetsk Oblast. Apart from Mariupol, Kramatorsk is the largest urban centre in eastern Ukraine that was occupied by DNR or LNR militants and then recaptured. After the outbreak of the conflict, local media in Kramatorsk were placed under severe restrictions. DNR officials visited local newspaper offices, radio stations and television channels, and used intimidation and sometimes violence to induce compliance[2]. The city is thus an important object of scholarly attention, as studying it can provide unique insights into how the conflict was framed and justified at the time it began, and how these frames and justifications were perceived by local residents[3]. The question exists to what extent Kramatorsk is "typical"

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[1] Victoria Butenko and Nick Paton Walsh, "Ukrainian Authorities: Separatists Cleared from 2 Eastern Cities," CNN, 2014, https://edition.cnn.com/2014/07/05/world/meast/ukraine-crisis/index.html.

[2] Mikhail Horodetskii, "Torezskuiu gazetu 'Gorniak' razgromili Separatisty," *Www.day.kyiv.ua*, May 8, 2014, http://day.kyiv.ua/ru/article/media/torezskuyu-gazetu-gornyak-razgromili-separatisty.; Natal'ia Prigodich, "Glavnyi Redaktor gazety 'Donbass' Aleksandr Brizh: 'Iz Redaktsii Menya Vyveli Pod Dulom Avtomata,'" *Www.tut.by*, February 20, 2015, https://news.tut.by/society/436459.html?crnd=4043.; Novosti Donbassa, "Budni 'DNR': V Toreze Sozhgli Ofis gazety 'Gorniak,'" *Www.novosti.dn.ua*, June 6, 2014, http://novosti.dn.ua/news/209637-budny-dnr-v-toreze-sozhgly-ofys-gornyak.

[3] Kimitaka Matsuzato, "The Donbas War and Politics in Cities on the Front: Mariupol and Kramatorsk," *Nationalities Papers* 46, no. 6 (2018): 1008–27, https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2018.1480598.

of the experience of the occupation and its aftermath for cities and towns in Donbas that were recaptured by the Ukrainian armed forces. For example, like Kramatorsk, Mariupol and Slaviansk were both temporarily occupied by the DNR, but it is not clear if these two cities underwent the same developments as Kramatorsk described in this chapter. Indeed, Kimitaka Matsuzato suggests that political developments in Mariupol and Kramatorsk diverged radically after the occupation (with Kramatorsk developing a highly competitive political landscape whereas Mariupol maintained a status quo where one party is highly dominant)[4], which suggests that questions relating to identity also underwent dissimilar developments. It is possible, for example, that Mariupol media discourse did not display the same shift towards a pro-Ukrainian identity as Kramatorsk, as I argue in this chapter. It goes beyond the scope of this dissertation to investigate these questions in detail. Nonetheless, with the above in mind, local media in Kramatorsk are a source of knowledge for those seeking to investigate how the Donbas conflict has influenced Ukrainian identity, and, more generally, can serve as a guideline for analysing how military conflicts influence identity formation[5].

In this chapter, I investigate the extent to which discursive local, regional or national identity building can be discerned in local media content in Kramatorsk, and how this process changed as the conflict progressed. I address the following questions:

- What topics were discussed in local news content before, during and after the 2014 occupation of Kramatorsk?
- What changes can be observed in these topics with regards to the occupation and its aftermath?
- What is the function of local, regional and national identity discourse in newspaper content in Kramatorsk, and what differences exist between the period of occupation and the periods before and after?

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[4] Ibid.
[5] Henrikson, "Nation-Building in Times of Conflict: The Discursive Construction of Russian National Identity through the Russo-Georgian War."; Wilson, "The Donbas in 2014: Explaining Civil Conflict Perhaps, but Not Civil War."; Giuliano, "Who Supported Separatism in Donbas? Ethnicity and Popular Opinion at the Start of the Ukraine Crisis."

3.2 Data set

The data set for this chapter consists of two Kramatorsk-based media outlets, *Tekhnopolis* and *Novosti Kramatorska*. *Tekhnopolis* is a small publication (circulation ca. 20.000) with 3 permanent employees and a number of freelancers[6]. Founded in 2001, it is owned by Sergei Vinogradov and a limited company called "Katlaif". "Katlaif" itself has four owners (two private individuals and two companies), and is run by *Tekhnopolis'* editor-in-chief Oleg Kubar'[7]. "Katlaif's" main activity is the publication of newspapers[8]. During the occupation by Russian-backed militants, *Tekhnopolis'* office was hit with a mortar shell and partially destroyed. The paper did manage to keep publishing during the conflict, albeit less frequently than before. After Kramatorsk returned to Ukrainian control, it resumed its regular publication schedule.

Novosti Kramatorska is a newspaper (published under the name *Gazeta Privet*; circulation approximately 5.800[9]) as well as a news site. Its printed version suspended publication around mid-2016, but its website[10] is updated daily with news and opinion articles. *Novosti Kramatorska* was founded by the entrepreneur and later civil servant Aleksandr Tolstoguzov in 2005[11]. In late May of 2014, Tolstoguzov was forced to leave Donetsk oblast together with his family due to pressure from DNR representatives. The newspaper was then taken over by DNR activists, and part of the staff agreed to work for them until the end of the occupation in July[12].

These two outlets were selected for several reasons. First, both are popular and well-read: *Tekhnopolis* is widely available in the kiosks that are dotted throughout town and read by a large audience in the city, while *Novosti Kramatorska* is one of the city's most popular news sites. Second, both outlets are distinctly local, catering almost exclusively to audiences in Kramatorsk. Third, both outlets are run by local residents

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[6] Institut Masovoï Informatsiï, "Analysis of Media-Situation in Southern and Eastern Oblasts of Ukraine: Donetsk Oblast," *Www.imi.org.ua*, March 11, 2016, https://imi.org.ua/en/articles/analysis-of-media-situation-in-southern-and-eastern-oblasts-of-ukraine-donetsk-oblast/.

[7] Its website can be found here: www.tehnopolis.com.ua

[8] Novosti Kramatorska, "Komu Prinadlezhat Kramatorskie SMI I Kto Opredeliaet Ikh Redaktsionnuiu Politiku I Soderzhanie," *Www.hi.dn.ua*, February 13, 2017, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=72966:2017-02-12-14-48-49&catid=55.:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.

[9] Institut Masovoï Informatsiï, "Analysis of Media-Situation in Southern and Eastern Oblasts of Ukraine: Donetsk Oblast."

[10] Website: http://www.hi.dn.ua

[11] Novosti Kramatorska, "Komu Prinadlezhat Kramatorskie SMI I Kto Opredeliaet Ikh Redaktsionnuiu Politiku I Soderzhanie."

[12] Institut Masovoï Informatsiï, "Holovred 'Novosti Kramatorska' vyïkhav Z Donechchyny. Redaktsiia Pratsioe Pid Tyskom DNR," *Www.imi.org.ua*, May 26, 2014, http://imi.org.ua/news/golovred-novosti-kramatorska-vijihav-z-donechchini-redaktsiya-pratsyue-pid-tiskom-dnr/.

and not owned by large media conglomerates, thus ensuring some degree of independence from local power structures. Fourth, while both *Tekhnopolis* and *Novosti Kramatorska* have a small number of permanent employees, they work with a large number of freelance journalists, and therefore offer a wide range of different perspectives.

The content of *Tekhnopolis* and *Novosti Kramatorska* news articles and editorials published between 9 January 2013 and 19 June 2017 was scraped from both websites. In total, 9.973 articles from *Tekhnopolis* and 12.246 articles from *Novosti Kramatorska* were obtained. Both corpora were then divided into 5 roughly equal time periods before, during and after the occupation. The first time period spans the months preceding the start of Euromaidan and the Donbas war (July-November 2013). The second overlaps with the Euromaidan demonstrations in Kyiv and the subsequent annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation (November-April 2014). Third is the period of the occupation of Kramatorsk (April-July 2014), and the fourth period immediately follows this period (July-November 2014). The fifth and final period is between February and May 2016, roughly a year and a half after hostilities in Kramatorsk had ended. In order for the dynamic topic model to work properly, the number of documents in each time period has to be roughly equal. Both corpora contained many more documents from 2013 than from any other year. Therefore, a number of articles was randomly sampled[13] from each of these periods so that their number would be more or less the same as the total number of articles published during the occupation (291 for *Tekhnopolis*, 616 for *Novosti Kramatorska*). The final data set consists of 1.436 articles for *Tekhnopolis* and 3.091 for *Novosti Kramatorska*[14]. Table 6 gives an overview.

Time period	Name of time period	Documents - Tekhn.	Documents - Novosti Kr.
08/07/2013 - 30/11/2013	2013	281	619
01/12/2013 - 11/04/2014	Euromaidan	296	619
12/04/2014 - 05/07/2014	Occupation	291	616
06/07/2014 - 01/11/2014	Post-crisis	285	615
16/02/2016 - 15/05/2016	2016	283	622
Total		1436	3091

Table 6: Data set overview

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[13] This randomisation was conducted using Excel's rand() function.
[14] The full corpora of articles for both outlets can be found in the supplement to this dissertation (files 3.2 and 3.3).

After cleaning the data by taking out common stop words and stemming the remaining words (see section 0.5.4), a dynamic topic model was built for the *Novosti Kramatorska* corpus[15]. The optimal number of dynamic topics based on the coherence score was 12[16]. The same was done for the smaller *Tekhnopolis* corpus, although the resulting topics were not readily interpretable[17]. Therefore, the "term frequency-inversed document frequency" statistic was calculated[18] for the top 50 terms in each time period[19]. Semantically related terms were grouped together manually into themes (e.g. "sports" or "arts") [20].

Both a dynamic topic model and the Tf-Idf method can point out the relative relevance of certain words within a corpus, and in the case of topic models even the relation between these words. That said, neither method is capable of offering context with regards to how a word is used, or what explains its relevance in (part of) a corpus[21]. The themes identified using these methods were used as a baseline, and analysed more granularly by looking at relevant articles individually.

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[15] The full topic model created from the *Novosti Kramatorska* corpus can be found in the supplement (file 3.1).
[16] TC-W2V score = 0.5520
[17] The full topic model can be found in the supplement (file 3.1). It is not entirely clear why this was the case; one possible explanation is the fact that the *Tekhnopolis* corpus is relatively small in each time stamp compared to *Novosti Kramatorska* (approximately 280 articles versus approximately 620 in each time stamp). This may impair the capacity of the algorithm to detect statistical relations between words in the corpus, a known problem in topic modelling. Considering the novelty of the dynamic topic modelling method (it was invented in 2016 for NMF), and its lack of use in published research, it is possible that the number of documents in each time stamp was simply too low for the dynamic NMF model to produce coherent results. Another (less likely) possibility is that the documents themselves were too short for the topic model to be able to pick up on coherent topics. This is known to happen, for example when attempting to run a topic model over a corpus of tweets downloaded from Twitter. See: David M Blei, Andrew Y Ng, and Michael I Jordan, "Latent Dirichlet Allocation," *J. Mach. Learn. Res.* 3 (2003): 993–1022, http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=944919.944937.; Zhao et al., "Comparing Twitter and Traditional Media Using Topic Models"; Hong and Davison, "Empirical Study of Topic Modeling in Twitter."
[18] Luhn, "A Statistical Approach to Mechanized Encoding and Searching of Literary Information."
[19] This is to some extent an arbitrary cut-off. The choice of calculating only the top 50 Tf-Idf scores was made because the Tf-Idf scores per time stamp taper off rapidly after 50 and approach 0.
[20] The supplement contains the complete Tf-Idf score table as well as the theme tables (file 3.1).
[21] Kohlbacher, "The Use of Qualitative Content Analysis in Case Study Research."

3.3 Results & discussion

Table 7 below displays all 12 dynamic topics for the *Novosti Kramatorska*-corpus, aggregated over all 5 time stamps (labelled 2013, Euromaidan, Occupation, Post-Crisis, and 2016). The table gives a broad impression of each topic without delving into detail about how the topics evolve over time. Displayed are an English translation and the original Russian transliteration in brackets.

Rank	Topic 1	Topic 2	Topic 3	Topic 4	Topic 5	Topic 6
1	city (gorodsk-)	place (mest-)	house (dom)	individual (lits)	children (det-)	water (vod-)
2	council (sovet)	contest (sorevnovan-)	street (ulits-)	Ukraine (ukrain-)	school (shkol-)	water canal (vodokana-)
3	MP (deputat)	tournament (turnir)	region (raion)	state (adj.) (gosudarstven-)	competition (konkurs)	water supply (vodosnabzhen-)
4	question (vopros)	chapionship (chempionat)	repair (remont)	centre (tsentr)	child- (detsk-)	supply (podach-)
5	head (golov-)	team (komand-)	suffer (postradav-)	occupy (zaniat-)	parents (roditel-)	drinking- (pitev-)
6	mayor (mer)	amidst (sred)	apartment (kvartir-)	Donetsk	class (klass-)	city (gorod)
7	meeting (zasedan-)	Donetsk	driver (voditel-)	pension (pens-)	library (bibliotek-)	payment (oplat-)
8	Andrei (andr-)	participate (uchast)	accident (dtp)	management (upravlen-)	youth (molodezh-)	service (uslug-)
9	city (gorod)	oblast	work (rabot-)	payment (vyplat-)	holiday (prazdnik)	resident (zhitel-)
10	deputy (zamestitel)	Ukraine (ukrain)	car (avtomobil-)	oblast	event (meropriiat-)	company (predpriiat-)

Rank	Topic 7	Topic 8	Topic 9	Topic 10	Topic 11	Topic 12
1	day (den-)	Avangard (avangard)	Kramatorsk (kramatorsk)	company (predpriiat-)	summer (letn-)	Hryvnia (grn)
2	weather (pogod-)	team (komand-)	newspaper (gazet-)	pa (pa-)	police (milits-)	million (mln)
3	first (perv-)	match (match)	news (novost-)	EMSS (EMSS)	man (muzhchin-)	year (god)
4	people's (narodn-)	game (igr-)	city (gorod)	company (kompan-)	Hryvnia (griv-)	thousand (tys-)
5	American (amerikansk)	minute (minut-)	read (chita-)	production (produkts-)	legal (ugolovn-)	company (predpriiat-)
6	history (istor-)	league (lig-)	journalist (zhurnalist)	manufacturing (proizvodstv-)	thief (vor)	sum (summ-)
7	air (vozdukh)	ball (miach)	our (nash)	Energomashspetsstal'	reverse (obrat)	budget (biudzhet)
8	token (primet)	football player (futbolist)	which (kotor-)	major (krupn-)	theft (krazh)	Hryvnia (grn)
9	clear (iasn-)	first (perv-)	also (takzh-)	factory (zavod)	apartment (kvartir-)	owed (zadolzhen-)
10	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	round (tur)	relate (rasskaza-)	year (god)	criminal (zloumyshlennik)	consist (sostav)

Table 7: Novosti Kramatorska dynamic topics (aggregated)

The topics in table 7 are sufficiently coherent: broadly speaking, topic 1 is about local politics; topic 2 about local sports; topic 3 about local infrastructure; topic 4 about national politics; topic 5 about children and education; topic 6 about water management; topic 7 about the weather; topic 8 about Avangard Kramatorsk, the local football team; topic 9 about local news and the media; topic 10 about local industry; topic 11 about crime; and topic 12 about money. The full list of dynamic topics can be found in the supplement, file 3.1.

For the *Tekhnopolis* corpus, the Tf-Idf statistic calculation yielded a total of 154 separate terms appearing at least once[22]. These scores per term were then plotted over time in line graphs, in order to illustrate graphically the relative salience of these terms in each time stamp. 40 out of 154 terms were manually categorised into topics of discussion; the other 104 terms could not be placed into any intuitive categories, and were excluded.

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[22] Supplement, file 3.1

The tables and graphs in the discussion below serve as guidance for further qualitative analysis. There are four main themes that emerge from conducting the dynamic topic modelling and Tf-Idf analyses, each reflective of a particular aspect of identity discourse: *arts and culture*; *sports*; *spatial groups of membership*; and *war*. I will discuss these themes and their evolution over time below, with special consideration of how identity markers, attributes, practices and imports are employed in media discourse.

3.3.1 Arts and culture
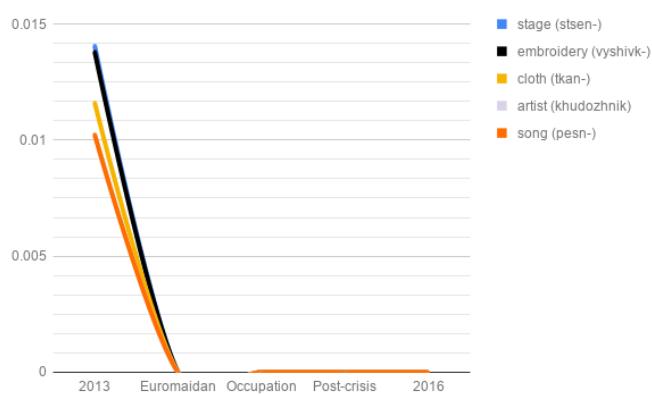
Figure 8: Tf-idf graph for "arts & culture" theme

The first theme is arts and culture, more specifically identity practices such as cultural celebrations and festivals, national or local holidays, art exhibitions, et cetera. In *Tekhnopolis*, there was a significant decline in coverage related to arts and culture as the crisis developed. Figure 8 shows the Tf-Idf statistic (on the vertical axis) for the terms "stsena" (stage), "vyshivka" (embroidery), "tkan'" (cloth), "khudozhnik" (artist), and "pesnia" (song). These terms disappeared from the rankings once the crisis started, and then did not re-emerge after the occupation ended. This decline is also noticeable when looking at articles more closely. In 2013, a typical report in *Tekhnopolis* would cover (with some enthusiasm) upcoming holidays or cultural festivals, for example:

> The favourite holidays of all citizens of Kramatorsk are approaching: the Day of the City (den' goroda) and the Day of the Mechanics" (den' mashinostroitelei).[23]

Local (as opposed to national Ukrainian) holidays were the main point of focus. This changed, however, with the start of the occupation. On April 21 2014, when the DNR

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[23] Tehnopolis, "Kaban'ia Korrida Otmeniaetsia!," *Www.tehnopolis.com.ua*, September 4, 2013, https://tehnopolis.com.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4579:2013-09-09-203606&catid=59:2011-01-11-21-18-52&Itemid=15.

had not yet taken full control over the city's media, a *Tekhnopolis* writer voiced his discontent with the DNR's lack of respect for cultural traditions:

> In Kramatorsk, the militants (opolchentsy) do not care about holidays. On the second day of Easter, April 21, a regular rally of supporters of the [DNR] gathered near the executive committee [building]. After some short speeches, those gathered were divided into three groups. One went to the SBU, the second went to the airfield, and the third went to the city police department.[24]

A few weeks later. the DNR was in more firm control of the city. According to one eyewitness account, the city was "frozen" most of the time, with people spending most of their time inside[25]. Holidays, festivals and other cultural events became scarce, with one exception. Alina Mikhailiuk describes the festivities on Victory Day (celebrated annually on May 9 to commemorate the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany):

> True, on May 9, Kramatorsk woke up for a moment. Everything was the same as one year, five years ago. A parade, veterans in tears, a cheerfully burning Eternal Flame and songs from the war years. Residents of the city carried in their hands a 60-meter long St. George's ribbon, doubtless as some symbol of peace.[26]

The article makes no mention of the DNR or any of its representatives in the city, and unlike the period prior to the occupation, the article provides few further details, despite the historical relevance of the holiday in the region. Speaking more generally, articles that mention identity practices such as celebrations or cultural festivities organised by the DNR play no role in the corpus. When the occupation was over, however, its reports about cultural celebrations once again took on a more optimistic tone:

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[24] Sergei Len'kov, "Kramatorskie Opolchentsy Sobralis' Pered Gorotdelom," *Www.tehnopolis.com.ua*, April 21, 2014, https://tehnopolis.com.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5689:2014-04-21-14-19-00&catid=59:2011-01-11-21-18-52&Itemid=15.
[25] Alina Mikhailiuk, "Ukhodiashchii Kramatorsk: Reportazh Po Pamiati Zhitel'nitsy Razrushennogo Goroda," *Novaya Gazeta*, July 2, 2014, https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2014/07/02/60195-uhodyaschiy-kramatorsk.
[26] Ibid.

On the city's central square […] there are currently mass celebrations going on. The 'City of Craftsmen' is working again: the citizens of Kramatorsk are displaying their wide spectrum of talents.[27]

Importantly, unlike before and during the occupation, reports about cultural celebrations voiced explicit support for the Ukrainian army and government:

On October 14, on the holiday of the Protection of Our Most Holy Lady Theotokos and Eternal Virgin Mary and the Cossacks, guests arrived at the Kramatorsk Ukrainian gymnasium: members of the military, led by the Chief Inspector of the Main Inspectorate of the Ministry of Defense, Colonel Valentin Fedichev.[28]

The author of the above article describes the Intercession of the Theotokos and the Day of the Cossacks. The former is an Orthodox holiday stemming from the time of Kyiv Rus'. It was considered to be a holiday especially for young girls and women, as most of the work that had to be done on the land would end around October, and it came time for them to look for a husband[29]. During the times of the Zaporizhian Sich (roughly 16th-18th century[30]), October 14 became an important holiday for Ukrainian Cossacks, who would elect a Hetman (commander) on this day. In later times, the holiday also began to symbolise and celebrate the history of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), which waged guerrilla campaigns against Nazi, Soviet and Polish occupiers of Western Ukraine during and around World War II[31]. The holiday was not mentioned at all by *Tekhnopolis* in 2013, and a 2011 article in the same newspaper about the holiday was, if anything, critical of Ukraine's treatment of the Cossacks:

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[27] Ol'ga Stadnichenko, "Kramatorsk Otmechaet Svoe 146-Letie (Foto)," *Www.tehnopolis.com.ua*, September 27, 2014, https://tehnopolis.com.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9550:---146-&catid=59:2011-01-11-21-18-52&Itemid=15.

[28] Marina Sidel'nikova, "Uchashchiesia Kramatorskoi Ukrainskoi Gimnazii Ugoshchali Soldat Medom I Varen'em," *Www.tehnopolis.com.ua*, October 16, 2014, https://tehnopolis.com.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10052:2014-10-16-08-41-18&catid=59:2011-01-11-21-18-52&Itemid=15.

[29] Oleg Karp'iak, "Pokrova: Prazdnik Voinov, Khristian I Iazychnikov," *BBC Ukraina*, October 14, 2015, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine_in_russian/2015/10/151014_ru_s_pokrova_holiday.

[30] For more information, see Paul Robert Magosci, *A History of Ukraine: The Land and Its Peoples*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 193.

[31] Ibid., 695–97.

It is worth mentioning that today's Cossacks are not going through the best of times. 'Previously, the Cossacks received more attention from the authorities, and our movement developed much more actively,' says the Hetman of the Kramatorsk Cossack regiment named after Skoropadskyi, Sergei Zadorozhnyi. 'At the moment, no law with regards to the Ukrainian Cossacks has been adopted for the creation of organisational, legal, financial, informational and other mechanisms for the Cossack movement.'[32]

Starting in 2015, October 14 was to also be celebrated as the "Day of the Defender of Ukraine" (den' zakhisnika Ukraïny), as ordered by then-president Poroshenko[33]. However, already in 2014, *Tekhnopolis* tied the celebration of this holiday to celebrations of Ukrainian independence and national identity, a significant narrative shift towards identification with Ukraine.

A similar, but not identical pattern is visible in *Novosti Kramatorska*. Table 8 shows dynamic topic number 5, which relates to education and children, with terms like "shkola" (school), "deti" (children), "uchenik" (pupil) "biblioteka" (library) appearing throughout the topic. Articles within this topic are typically about events like road safety campaigns[34] or reading contests in the Kramatorsk library[35]. Table 8 also displays a number of associated topics that the model sees as related to the main topic. These are labelled as 2013(2), 2013(3), Post-Crisis(2), et cetera.

[32] Liuba Sidorenko, "Kramatorskie Kazaki Otmetili Praznik Pokrova," *Tehnopolis*, October 19, 2011, https://tehnopolis.com.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1574:2011-10-25-08-55-20&catid=59:2011-01-11-21-18-52&Itemid=15.

[33] Petro Poroshenko, "UKAZ PREZIDENTA UKRAЇNY №806/2014: Pro Den' Zakhisnika Ukraïny," Pub. L. No. №806/2014 (2014), https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/8062014-17816.

[34] Natalia Gurkovskaia, "Kramatorskaia Shkola No. 2 Poluchila Gramotu Ot Upravleniia GAI," *Novosti Kramatorska*, November 5, 2013, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=39380&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.

[35] Anna Stepanova, "Festival' 'Zdorovyi Gorod' v Kramatorske," *Novosti Kramatorska*, September 3, 2013, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=37009&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.

Rank	Overall	2013	2013(2)	2013(3)	Euromaidan	Euromaidan(2)
1	children (det-)	children (det-)	exhibition (vystavk-)	school (shkol-)	children (det-)	competition (konkurs)
2	school (shkol-)	child (rebenk-)	library (bibliotek-)	education (obrazovan-)	children's (detsk-)	winner (pobeditel-)
3	competition (konkurs)	centre (tsentr)	master (master)	textbook (uchebn-)	library (bibliotek-)	school (shkol-)
4	children's (detsk-)	family (sem-)	competition (konkurs)	year (god)	holiday (prazdnik)	art (iskusstv-)
5	parents (roditel-)	children's (detsk-)	Kramatorsk (kramatorsk)	pupil (uchenik)	event (meropriiat-)	present (podark-)
6	class (klass-)	occupy (zaniat-)	event (meropriiat-)	class (klass-)	holy (sviat-)	editorial office (redakts-)
7	library (bibliotek)	parents (roditel-)	city (gorod)	management (upravlen-)	book (knig-)	photograph (fotograf)
8	youth (molodezh-)	woman (zhenshchin-)	consist (sosto-)	director (direktor)	parents (roditel-)	learn (ucha-)
9	holiday (prazdnik)	doctor (vrach)	September (sentiabr-)	student (shkol'nik)	exposition (vystavk-)	will (budut)
10	event (meropriiat-)	mum (mam-)	central (tsentral'n-)	Evgenii (evgen-)	present (podark-)	laureate (laureat-)

Rank	Occupation	Post-Crisis	Post-Crisis(2)	Post-Crisis(3)	Post-Crisis(4)	2016
1	children (det-)	aid (pomoshch-)	school (shkol-)	occupy (zaniat-)	children (det-)	competition (konkurs)
2	school (shkol-)	IDPs (pereselents-)	pupil (uchenik)	group (grupp-)	youth (molodezh-)	class (klass-)
3	parents (roditel-)	centre (tsentr)	education (obrazovan-)	psychological (psikhologich	sports (sport)	children (det-)
4	graduate (vypusknik)	refugee (bezhenst-)	textbook (uchebn-)	library (bibliotek-)	children's (detsk-)	holiday (prazdnik)
5	Kramatorsk (kramatorsk)	things (veshch-)	year (god)	club (klub)	department (otdel)	school (shkol-)
6	youth (molodezh-)	product (produkt)	management (upravlen-)	parents (roditel-)	antoshka (antoshk-)	event (meropriiat-)
7	children's (detsk-)	humanitarian (gumanitarn-)	lesson (urok)	project (proekt)	kid (malysh-)	library (bibliotek)
8	sports (sport-)	volunteer (volunter)	repair (remont)	bitter (gor'k-)	city (gorodsk-)	master (master)
9	education (obrazovan-)	need (nuzhda-)	Evgenii (evgen-)	frame (ramk-)	parents (roditel-)	art (iskusstv-)
10	department (otdel)	clothes (odezhd-)	Sidorov (sidorov)	zap (zap)	house (dom)	participant (uchastnik)

Table 8: dynamic topic 5 (education & children)

During the occupation of Kramatorsk and the period just after it, articles in *Novosti Kramatorska* related to education and children became less frequently associated with arts and culture. In 2013 as well as during the period of the Euromaidan demonstrations, topics associated with the main topic included terms like "exhibition" (vystavka), "contest" (konkurs) and "art" (iskusstvo). Such terms disappeared from the list during the period of occupation. In the post-occupation period, the main topic went in a different direction altogether, coming to relate to humanitarian aid, refugees and internally displaced people. This development can be explained by the fact that many of the refugees from the conflict zone were children[36]. Still, terms related to arts and culture were sparse during the occupation. In 2016, terms like "contest", "holiday" and "art" reappear in the topic model, indicating renewed interest in arts and culture.

An additional development, which is not directly visible in table 8, is that cultural celebrations took on a more explicitly national character after the occupation. In 2013, *Novosti Kramatorska* would report on national holidays in a factual manner, without much reference to national symbols:

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[36] UNICEF, "Ukraine: Humanitarian Situation Report," www.unicef.org, 2018, https://www.unicef.org/appeals/files/UNICEF_Ukraine_Humanitarian_Situation_Report_June_2018.pdf.

The Day of the Lawyers of Ukraine first appeared in Ukraine's holiday calendar through Presidential Decree No. 1022/97 of September 16, 1997. This is a holiday that unites lawyers from different fields of activity who stand to protect the rights and freedoms of Ukrainians.[37]

In 2016, the same author wrote regularly about events related to Ukraine or Ukrainian identity. A good example is an article about a Ukrainian spelling bee that was held in Kramatorsk in 2016. Not only was it organised as a way to encourage speaking Ukrainian in a predominantly Russian-speaking region, it was also co-run by the Ukrainian army:

The winners of the 'let's read Ukrainian' contest, organised by the Kramatorsk Women's Club 'Pani', the Pushkin central children's library, the headquarters of the ATO and studio 'Nash Dom', were very lucky […] The main prize for young participants was a trip, together with their parents, to the pearl of western Ukraine – the city of L'viv.[38]

The pattern visible in both newspapers is clear: before the occupation, cultural and artistic activities had a primarily local character in both news outlets, and there was relatively little overt association with Ukrainian identity as a whole. After the occupation, however, both *Tekhnopolis* and *Novosti Kramatorska* reported on celebrations and holidays with explicit reference to Ukraine, the Ukrainian language, or Ukrainian culture. In the case of *Tekhnopolis*, this even happened before the holiday came to officially include more elements related to the Ukrainian army. Second, articles published during the period of occupation showed little to no attention for cultural or other celebrations organised by the DNR authorities, apart from the May 9 celebration.

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[37] Valerii Monaenko, "Segodnia 8 Oktiabria, Vtornik. Pogoda, Narodnye Primety, Den' v Istorii," *Novosti Kramatorska*, October 8, 2013, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=38371&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.
[38] Valerii Monaenko, "L'vov Radushno Vstretil Iunykh Kramatorchan (Fotootchet)," *Novosti Kramatorska*, March 30, 2016, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=65268&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.

3.3.2 Sports

The second theme is (local) sports, especially football (see figure 9). Like arts and culture, sports-related topics were prevalent in the pre-crisis era of 2013, then receded from view entirely as the crisis started and came to a head, and finally re-emerged again in 2016. This recovery, however, was only partial.
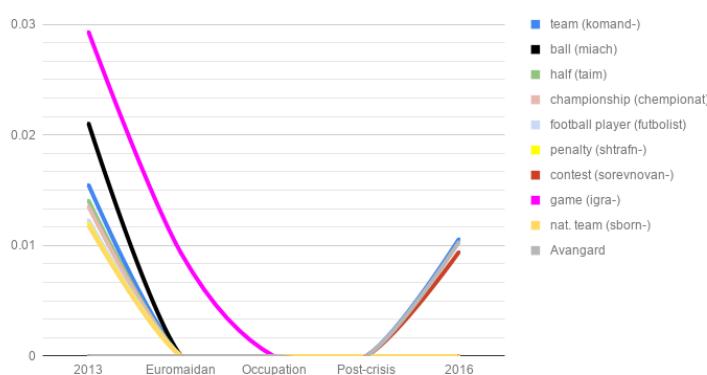
Figure 9: Tf-idf graph for "sports" theme

Like arts and culture, sports became a contentious issue during the occupation. The local football team, FK Avangard Kramatorsk, which plays in Ukraine's second division, was forced to bow out of a large chunk of the 2013/2014 season because of the occupation[39].

The sport took on a political dimension that led to some frustration among the residents of Kramatorsk[40]. The same pattern from local to national is visible in *Novosti Kramatorska*, where football was a particularly popular topic. Table 9 gives an overview of dynamic topic 8, "Avangard Kramatorsk".

Rank	Overall	2013	2013(2)	Euromaidan	Occupation
1	Avangard (avangard)	team (komand-)	Avangard (avangard)	Avangard (avangard)	Avangard (avangard)
2	team (komand-)	Avangard (avangard)	match (match)	team (komand-)	ball (miach-)
3	match (match)	game (igr-)	table (tablits-)	game (igr-)	team (komand-)
4	game (igr-)	minute (minut-)	tournament (turnirn-)	minute (minut-)	match (match)
5	minute (minut-)	goal (gol-)	tomorrow (zavtr-)	match (match)	game (igr-)
6	league (lig-)	football player (futbolist)	stadium (stadion)	football player (futbolist)	goal (vorot-)
7	ball (miach-)	match (match)	league (lig-)	Dmitrii (dmitr-)	round (tur)
8	football player (futbolist)	round (tur)	Avangard player (avangardovts-)	score (schet)	league (lig-)
9	first (perv-)	ball (miach-)	place (mest-)	opponent (sopernik)	minute (minut-)
10	round (tur)	first (perv-)	football (futbol)	collection (sbor)	score (schet)

Table 9: dynamic topic 8: Avangard football club

The topic has no columns after the "Euromaidan" time period, indicating that the model does not consider this topic to continue after the occupation. This does not mean that Avangard ceased to be discussed altogether in the post-crisis and 2016 time periods, only that the algorithm could not pick up on a coherent continuation of this topic. This is not entirely surprising, as Avangard Kramatorsk withdrew from competition shortly

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[39] Vasilii Hnatiuk, "Nash Sopernik: Avangard Kramatorsk," *Www.fcgornyak.dp.ua*, July 29, 2015, http://www.fcgornyak.dp.ua/newss/archive/3882-nash-sopernik-avangard-kramatorsk.html.
[40] Press-sluzhba FK "Avangard" Kramatorsk, "Match 'Avangard' Kramatorsk - 'Gelios' Khar'kov Perenesen," *Www.fc-Avangard.com.ua*, April 25, 2014, http://fc-avangard.com.ua/news/864-match-avangard-kramatorsk-gelios-kharkov-perenesen.

after the occupation started, and no matches were played for a significant period of time. In the 2016 period, Avangard was back to playing matches, but the match reports published in *Novosti Kramatorska* were often more sparse and terse. In 2013, a typical match report would include interviews, descriptions of the match, and discussions about team's championship prospects[41]. In 2016, a report would often look like this, in full:

> On Saturday, April 23, Avangard Football Club played an away match in Cherkassy in the 22nd round of the league. The match ended in failure for Iakov Krypak's team – Avangard Kramatorsk's first defeat this season. The first goal came 31 minutes into the first half. The second time the ball flew into Avangard's net was at the start of the second half. The players of the Kramatorsk club never managed to score a single goal against their opponents. The game ended with a score of 2:0 in favour of the home team[42].

As with *Tekhnopolis*, football began to take on a political role in *Novosti Kramatorska*'s reports after the occupation. When Aleksandr Iaskovich, a Kramatorsk local playing for Avangard, was banned from the Ukrainian league for playing for the LNR squad against Abkhaziia, Igor Kochetov, the vice president of the Football Federation of Ukraine (FFU), discussed the ban with a journalist[43]:

> *Kochetov:* I don't know exactly what's going on with the Iaskovych situation and his application to play for Avangard. But last year we strongly recommended not to allow players who moonlighted in matches for the unrecognised republics.
>
> *Journalist:* What has changed in the past year?
>
> *Kochetov:* Well, we probably need a more balanced approach to each individual case. I assume that a young football player can make a mistake, but it's important that he doesn't repeat it.
>
> *Journalist:* So it's worth forgiving him?

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[41] Natalia Gurkovskaia, "Sergei Shevchenko: 'Svoi Momenty Realizovat' Ne Smogli...,'" *Novosti Kramatorska*, September 16, 2013, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=37556&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.

[42] Masha Malinkina, "'Avangard' privez Iz Cherkass Porazhenie," *Novosti Kramatorska*, April 24, 2016, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=65900&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.

[43] Valerii Monaenko, "Kramatorskii Futbolist Rasskazhet Ob Igre Za sbornuiu 'LNR,'" *Novosti Kramatorska*, March 25, 2016, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=65131&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.

Kochetov: All sides need to sit down and work out a position. That goes for the teams, the FFU, the footballers and journalists. Only this way can we make a fair decision.

In democratic as well as authoritarian states, sports and sports reporting have often been used to promote national or regional identity[44]. Michael Billig considers the sports press to be a key part of what he calls "banal nationalism", stating that the sports pages

day after day, invite 'us', the readers, to support the national cause. The sports pages are predominantly read by men for pleasure. They can be seen as banal rehearsals for the extraordinary times of crisis, when the state calls upon its citizenry, and especially its male citizenry, to make ultimate sacrifices in the cause of nationhood.[45]

This utility of sports as an identity-building practice is employed even in times of conflict. In 2002, for example, a football match was held in war-torn Afghanistan between peacekeeping troops and a team from Kabul. The match was billed as a "game of unity", and was meant to symbolise the overthrow of the Taliban regime, despite the war being far from over at that time[46].

During the occupation of Kramatorsk, sports and sports coverage did not serve this purpose as an identity building tool. It only resumed this function after the occupation was over, when sports began to be contextualised within the framework of the war. Sports as a topic of discussion thus underwent a process of politicisation. Sports coverage was not employed as an identity building tool in the traditional sense (according to Billig[47] and Waquet & Vincent[48]); part of the reason for this is that the DNR and the LNR were unrecognised, and it was not possible to organise sports competitions between Ukrainian and DNR/LNR sides. Rather, sports coverage

[44] Dilwyn Porter, "Sport and National Identity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sports History*, ed. Robert Edelman and Wayne Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 480,
http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199858910.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199858910-e-33.
[45] Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 12.
[46] BBC News, "'Unity' Football Match in Kabul," *Www.bbc.co.uk*, February 8, 2002,
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/1807955.stm.
[47] Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.
[48] Arnaud Waquet and Joris Vincent, "Wartime Rugby and Football: Sports Elites, French Military Teams and International Meets during the First World War.," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, no. 3–4 (2011): 372–92.

acquired a political element as a means to project unity and solidarity with Ukraine and Ukrainians after the occupation, but not with the DNR/LNR or their supporters.

3.3.3 Spatial groups of membership
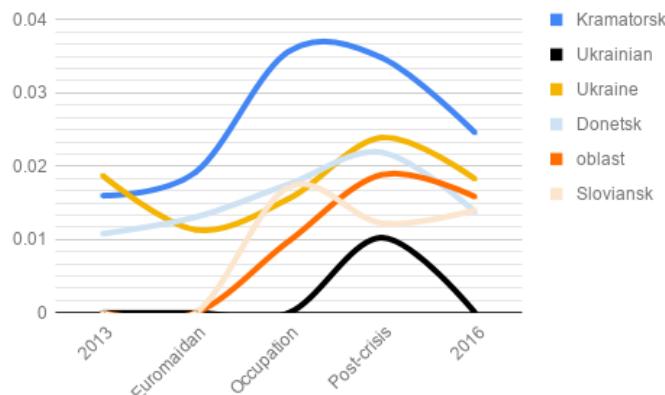
Figure 10: Tf-Idf graph for the "local identity" theme

The third theme is spatial groups of membership, encompassing toponyms and words employed in discussions of the interaction between local and national issues. Figure 10 shows the Tf-Idf score for terms related to such spaces in the *Tekhnopolis* corpus over time. The figure shows that descriptions of geographical places became more explicit with the advent of the occupation. While terms like "Kramatorsk", "Ukraine" and "Donetsk" did have some relevance already in 2013, these terms ascended during the Euromaidan demonstrations and the occupation of Kramatorsk. Many of these terms reached their peak just after the occupation, and then declined again in 2016.

These patterns are partially explained by discussions in *Tekhnopolis* about the Euromaidan demonstrations, which were a contested subject within the city as well as a catalyst for discussing issues around local identity. *Tekhnopolis* published multiple stories and editorials about this topic from a variety of angles. Some articles expressed support for the Maidan demonstrations[49]. One editorial even said the following:

> I saw the eyes of the people on Maidan and St. Michael's Square. These aren't drunk madmen begging for pennies, they are the real owners (khoziaieva) of Ukraine![50]

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[49] Tehnopolis, "Kramatorchane I Vseukrainskaia Aktsiia Protesta," *Www.tehnopolis.com.ua*, December 2, 2013, https://tehnopolis.com.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4989:2013-12-02-141513&catid=59:2011-01-11-21-18-52&Itemid=15.

[50] Igor Bondarev, "Napriazhenie," *Www.tehnopolis.com.ua*, December 4, 2013, https://tehnopolis.com.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5056:2013-12-15-220831&catid=59:2011-01-11-21-18-52&Itemid=15.

At the same time, however, demonstrations were organised in Kramatorsk decrying the supposed chaos in Kyiv. Local politicians and businesspeople voiced their concerns in front of gatherings of citizens, and placed local issues, not only in Kramatorsk but in Donbas more generally, at the centre of the discussion. Usually they would come out in favour of the Ianukovych government:

> While in the western regions [of Ukraine] people place candles in memory of those killed in Kyiv and seize regional administration buildings, the situation in the east is completely different. Obviously, the values and priorities in different regions of the country do not currently coincide. On January 25, a rally was held in the central square of Kramatorsk, organised by the local Party of Regions. There was one issue on the agenda: the current situation in Ukraine. About 6 thousand people attended the rally, mainly workers of industrial enterprises and budgetary organisations […] The general opinion expressed at the rally was that the east of Ukraine is looking at the events taking place both in Kyiv and in the western regions of the country with deep indignation, and asks President Viktor Ianukovych to take all necessary measures to restore order.[51]

Just before the occupation, there was a vibrant ongoing discussion about eastern versus western Ukrainian identities, and a certain amount of concern that the demonstrations were primarily a western enterprise, while the east was left by the wayside. During the occupation, this focus on local issues shifted away from this "east versus west" frame. Instead, *Tekhnopolis* published editorials about local people's experiences during the conflict, although both overt criticism and expressions of support for the DNR authorities were not present:

> 'As soon as they announced the Anti-Terrorist Operation, I left the city for a resort to survive this ordeal and heal,' says Kramatorsk resident Larisa Ivanovna. 'But the situation has become more complicated, and it is unknown how long it will last. Money is running out. My pensions aren't paid. All the news I receive from Kramatorsk is discouraging. I talked with friends on the phone

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[51] Natal'ia Mironenko, "Miting Vozmushcheniia," *Www.tehnopolis.com.ua*, January 25, 2014, https://tehnopolis.com.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5206:2014-01-25-180009&catid=59:2011-01-11-21-18-52&Itemid=15.

who are in [Kramatorsk] right now. All of them said that if it's at all possible, it's better not to return. Where do I go now? Opportunities are gone! I don't know whom to ask for help...'[52]

Ukrainian symbols began to take up a more central place in *Tekhnopolis*' coverage than they had before the start of the occupation:

For the second week in a row a People's Veche[53] was held near the statue of [Ukrainian national writer and poet] Taras Shevchenko. This time there were no representatives of the executive power, nor were there heads of local enterprises, who were invited to the last meeting. There were representatives of different political factions present, and the public was widely represented.[54]

Aside from this increased focus on national rather than regional identity, there was also a retrospective aspect to *Tekhnopolis*' coverage, looking back at the period of DNR control over the city. During the occupation, DNR officials took several measures intended to foster support for the new authorities; for example, the price of a bus ticket was lowered from 3.5 to 3 hryvnia. After the Ukrainian army regained control of the city, *Tekhnopolis* published an article arguing that this price decrease was, in effect, nothing but a public relations move:

As for the revision of transportation fares agreed upon during a session of the City Council, in the direction of reducing it, the conversation from the representatives of the DNR was short, and the decision was peremptory: people with machine guns in camouflage uniforms simply demanded that the transportation company's management reduce fares to 3 hryvnia. This turned out to be a spectacular PR-move for the ordinary man in the street: 'Look! It was bad, and now it's good!' Looking back on the months when representatives of the DNR were leading the city, Sergei Dubovoi tells [*Tekhnopolis*] how it was

[52] Milana Chitak, "Dolgo Li, Korotko Li Kamatorchanam Razblokirovat' Pensiiu?," *Www.tehnopolis.com.ua*, June 26, 2014, https://tehnopolis.com.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7064:2014-06-26-07-42-58&catid=59:2011-01-11-21-18-52&Itemid=15.
[53] "Veche" is a word for a popular assembly in medieval Slavic-speaking countries and city-states. It was later also used to mean "parliament".
[54] Ol'ga Stadnichenko, "V Kramatorske vo Vremia Veche Ozvuchili Protest I Nedoverie (Video)," *Www.tehnopolis.com.ua*, September 14, 2014, https://tehnopolis.com.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9197:2014-09-14-06-07-16&catid=59:2011-01-11-21-18-52&Itemid=15.

necessary to organise 8 buses to Kharkiv every day, and 6 to Berdiansk, just to get people out of the combat zone. DNR activists simply gave the drivers gasoline for the trip, without paying for their work and without taking into account depreciation costs. There were absurd situations when they demanded a bus to Rostov, and in the morning it turned out that they were to go to Voronezh. […] People had to be taken out to Rostov under artillery fire. In this particular instance, one driver was wounded in the back.[55]

This article constitutes an attempt to explain retroactively some of the reasons why some Kramatorsk residents may have displayed little discontent (or perhaps even some enthusiasm) vis-à-vis the DNR authorities. Two things are worth noting here. Firstly, there was a marked absence of identity discourse during the period of occupation (such as the "Novorossiia" project[56], the "Russian World"[57] or Donbas identity[58]; see chapter 1). Secondly, even in hindsight there was no discussion about the identity aspect of the DNR project that Kramatorsk was briefly part of, neither in a positive nor in a negative light.

The *Novosti Kramatorska* corpus paints a picture that is somewhat more complex. In December of 2013, a *Novosti Kramatorska* writer expressed her reservations about the Euromaidan demonstrations and their increasingly political character, decrying the arrival of West-Ukrainian political activists[59]. Starting in late February, however, *Novosti Kramatorska* began to express support for the pro-Euromaidan protesters and discomfort with the "Antimaidan" (or Anti-Euromaidan) demonstrations happening in the city[60]. In March, this discomfort that journalists expressed about the polarising effect that the demonstrations were having on the population became more explicit.

[55] Ol'ga Stadnichenko, "Kak DNR 'Dogovarivalas'' s ATP O Snizhenii Tarifa," *Www.tehnopolis.com.ua*, August 3, 2014, https://tehnopolis.com.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8124:-lr-&catid=59:2011-01-11-21-18-52&Itemid=15.
[56] See O'Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov, "The Rise and Fall of 'Novorossiya': Examining Support for a Separatist Geopolitical Imaginary in Southeast Ukraine." and Laruelle, "The Three Colors of Novorossiya, or the Russian Nationalist Mythmaking of the Ukrainian Crisis."
[57] John O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal, and Vladimir Kolosov, "Who Identifies with the 'Russian World'? Geopolitical Attitudes in Southeastern Ukraine, Crimea, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 57, no. 6 (November 1, 2016): 745–78, https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2017.1295275.
[58] See Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870s-1990s.* and Sasse and Lackner, "War and Identity: The Case of the Donbas in Ukraine."
[59] Ol'ga Iurasova, "Na Kramatorskom Evromaidane Poiavilis' Politicheskie Flagi," *Novosti Kramatorska*, December 2, 2013, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=40338&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.
[60] Ol'ga Iurasova, "Maidanovtsev Zabrosali Iaitsami - Provokatsiia Ne Udalas'," *Novosti Kramatorska*, February 23, 2014, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=43576&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.

On March 11, *Novosti Kramatorska* expressed concern in an editorial that the rising tensions in the city may lead to violence:

> On March 9, people again met on the central square of the city and demanded a referendum. Citizens with a pro-Russian orientation want to be heard, and fear repression from the side of the new authorities. On Sunday, part of the demonstrators left for Donetsk, this is why the demonstration was not as sizeable as on Saturday. Activists set up shop right next to the Lenin monument, where they put up posters and took out a red flag. One of the members of the group was giving out leaflets for state employees which said that they will allegedly be fired if they don't sign a document stating that they fully support the authorities in Kyiv and will oppose the federalisation of the country. The leaflet called on its readers to refuse to sign such documents all together, as 'they can't fire everyone'. […] There were no attempts to take over any administration buildings. […] Time will tell what will come of this. We can only hope that there will be no bloodshed.[61]

The author is ambiguous about the nature of the demonstration. On the one hand, she indicates that the protesters came to their beliefs in a sincere manner, expressing them peacefully with the approval of the local authorities. On the other hand, she communicates uncertainty about what may be misinformation being spread by these same protesters, exacerbating local fears and anxieties about the Euromaidan revolution.

After the annexation of Crimea in mid-March, articles in *Novosti Kramatorska* became more positive about Ukrainian national sentiments. One article reported on a march held in favour of Ukrainian unity, and expressed approval of the diversity and supposed character of the demonstrators:

> Today, near the fountain on Trade Unions Square, there began a march for peace and unity and 'for a United Ukraine'. The march passed through the center of Kramatorsk and ended on Parkovaia Street. Members of the

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[61] Ol'ga Iurasova, "Gorozhane Khotiat Referenduma?," *Novosti Kramatorska*, March 11, 2014, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=44333&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.

organisation for disabled people 'Forum', the women's club 'Pany' and activists of the local Euromaidan all took part. It is symbolic that people with disabilities decided to show their citizenship in this way - even people in wheelchairs took part in the march. Even more, they were perhaps the most active participants of all.[62]

Note here the use of the word "citizenship" within the context of such a demonstration, indicative of a shift from a local to a national focus. Dynamic topic 9 (see table 10 below) reflects this in the term "Ukraine" (or "Ukrainian"), which is not in the list in 2013 but rises in the ranks after the demonstrations start.

Rank	Overall	2013	Euromaidan	Euromaidan(2)	Euromaidan(3)	Occupation	Occupation(2)
1	Kramatorsk (kramatorsk)	newspaper (gazet-)	this (et-)	Kramatorsk (kramatorsk)	demonstration (miting)	military (adj.) (voen-)	transportation (transport-)
2	newspaper (gazet-)	Kramatorsk (kramatorsk)	which (kotor-)	newspaper (gazet-)	square (ploshchad-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	route (marshrut)
3	news (novost-)	city (gorod)	very (ochen-)	news (novost-)	flag (flag)	airfield (aerodrom)	traffic (dvizhen-)
4	city (gorod)	news (novost-)	one's own (svo-)	journalist (zhurnalist)	gather (sobra-)	Kramatorsk (kramatorsk)	bus (avtobus)
5	read (chita-)	read (chita-)	self (sam-)	read (chita-)	activist (aktivist)	civil servant (silovik)	Kramatorsk (kramatorsk)
6	journalist (zhurnalist)	our (nash-)	word (slov-)	write (napisa-)	people (liud-)	checkpoint (blokpost)	passenger- (passazhirsk-)
7	our (nash-)	Tekhnopolis (tekhnopolis)	mayor (mer)	relate (rasskaza-)	near (vozl-)	armed (vooruzhen)	trolleybus (trolleibus)
8	which (kotor-)	page (stranits-)	need (nuzhn-)	page (stranits-)	monument (pamiatnik)	side (storon-)	walk (khod)
9	also (takzh-)	search (poisk)	work (rabot-)	publish (izdan-)	presence (prisutstv-)	helicopter (vertolet)	shipping (perevozk-)
10	relate (rasskaza-)	journalist (zhurnalist)	begin (poch-)	also (takzh-)	Euromaidan (evromaidan)	local (mestn-)	car (mashin-)

Rank	Occupation(3)	Post-Crisis	Post-Crisis(2)	Post-Crisis(3)	Post-Crisis(4)	2016
1	anti-crisis (antikrizisn-)	this (et-)	monument (pamiatnik)	newspaper (gazet-)	arrest (zaderzha-)	this (et-)
2	council (sovet)	city (gorod)	Lenin (lenin)	news (novost-)	military (adj.) (voen-)	Kramatorsk (kramatorsk)
3	demonstration (miting)	word (slov-)	square (ploshchad-)	read (chita-)	terrorist (terrorist)	city (gorod)
4	bloom (tsvel)	which (kotor-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	Kramatorsk (kramatorsk)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	which (kotor-)
5	committee (komitet)	people (liud-)	flower (tsvet)	edition (vypusk-)	Ukrainian security service (SBU)	Ukraine (ukrain-)
6	payment (vyplat-)	simple (prost-)	city (gorod)	point (tochk-)	Ukraine (ukrain-)	Donetsk (donetsk)
7	Pavel (pavel)	enterprise (predpriiat-)	Ukraine (ukrain-)	fresh (svezh-)	armed (vooruzhen-)	people (liud-)
8	city (gorod)	our (nash-)	national (natsional'n-)	ask (sprashiva-)	resident (zhitel-)	oblast (oblast)
9	aide (pomoshch-)	one's own (svo-)	wake (vech-)	sale (prodazh-)	DNR (dnr)	one's own (svo-)
10	square (ploshchad-)	speak (govor-)	Shevchenko (shevchenk-)	number/edition (nomer)	anti-terrorist operation (at-)	oblast- (oblastn-)

Table 10: Dynamic topic 9: Local news and the media.

Novosti Kramatorska's coverage of national holidays, but also of the Ukrainian army and government, became both more prominent and more positive. In October 2014, *Novosti Kramatorska* celebrated the Ukrainian parliamentary elections, and expressed gratitude to the Ukrainian army for defending the city:

Novosti Kramatorska will be showing all the most interesting moments of the parliamentary elections of 2014 live. Our editorial office plans to livestream all of the interesting moments of the election day on October 26, 2014. We will visit

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[62] Ol'ga Iurasova, "Organizatsiia Invalidov i 'Pani' proshli Marsh Mira," *Novosti Kramatorska*, March 22, 2014, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=44831&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.

the polling stations, show how ordinary citizens vote, as well as the activities of
the regional authorities and the Ukrainian military, which is protecting the city.[63]

Another article was published about Ukrainian Independence Day, going into detail
about the history of independent Ukraine[64]. Outright patriotic coverage also became
more common, for instance this quote about a "patriotic action" called "My homeland,
my fatherland – our Ukraine!" that took place in the city between 18 and 22 August[65].
At the local level, conflicts over the war and its relation to Ukrainian identity also played
out on the pages of *Novosti Kramatorska*. One controversial topic was a new policy
that required school teachers to include lessons on "love for Ukraine", in August 2014.
In contrast with the period before the occupation, it was clear which side the paper
supported:

> During the first classes in schools in Kramatorsk, teachers will talk with students
> about their love for Ukraine. [….] The theme of the first lesson will be 'United
> Ukraine'. In all Kramatorsk schools teachers will discuss with children, who
> survived the war, how important it is to keep the peace and keep Ukraine united.
> However, far from all teachers of the city share this opinion. During the
> occupation of the city by pro-Russian militants, some of them not only actively
> supported the militants' position, but also assisted terrorists at checkpoints.
> Therefore, community activists plan to attend some of these lessons and listen
> to what such teachers will tell their students.[66]

Both corpora thus show a similar pattern. Before the occupation, there was ambiguity
about the identity discourse on display in both *Tekhnopolis* and *Novosti Kramatorska*.
Reflecting also local tensions and scepticism about the Euromaidan demonstrations,
neither news outlet explicitly identified with either Euromaidan or the
counterdemonstrations that were going on in Kramatorsk. The annexation of Crimea,
but particularly the occupation of Kramatorsk itself, served as a catalyst for *national*

[63] Novosti Kramatorska, "'Novosti Kramatorska' predstsavliaiut: Vybory-Online," *Novosti Kramatorska*, October 26, 2014,
https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=51083&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.
[64] Valerii Monaenko, "S Dnem Nezavisimosti Ukrainy!," *Novosti Kramatorska*, August 24, 2014,
https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=49380&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.
[65] Ol'ga Iurasova, "V Patrioty S Pelenok," *Novosti Kramatorska*, August 29, 2014,
https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=49547&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.
[66] Novosti Kramatorska, "Novyi Uchebnyi God v Kramatorske Nachnetsia S Patriotizma," *Novosti Kramatorska*, August 30,
2014, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=49557&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.

identity discourse. After the occupation was over, local themes became intermixed with identification with Ukraine, politically as well as culturally.

3.3.4 War

The conflict in Kramatorsk began on April 12 of 2014, when unknown assailants attacked the Kramatorsk airfield. Military aircraft were seen patrolling the area, and gunshots and explosions were heard throughout the city. This sparked a concern among Kramatorsk residents that similar things may be happening as in Donetsk, where several local administration buildings were then being occupied by anti-government forces. And indeed, the activities at the airfield marked the beginning of a 3-month long series of clashes in the city.

Figure 11 shows the Tf-Idf graph for terms related to war in the *Tekhnopolis* corpus. It is clear that the conflict was a highly salient topic in *Tekhnopolis'* coverage during the occupation. *Tekhnopolis* published numerous reports about military engagements, combat operations and artillery shellings. After the occupation, the contact line was established at approximately 50
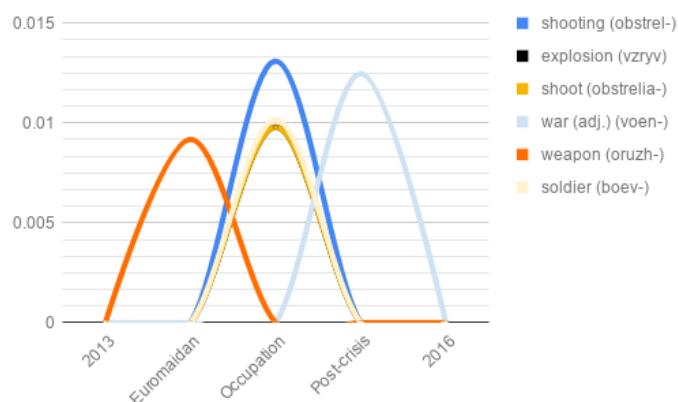
Figure 11: Tf-idf graph for "war" theme

kilometres away from the city, and military engagements continued to occur almost daily. Yet despite this continuation of the conflict, *Tekhnopolis'* coverage of it decreased. The only term related to the "war" theme that remains relevant after the occupation is "voennyi", which means "military (adj.)" or "soldier". The rest of the terms are primarily relevant during the occupation itself.

In terms of how *Tekhnopolis* portrayed the people who were responsible for occupying the city after the occupation, a clear distinction was made between the ingroup (citizens of Kramatorsk opposed to the occupation) and the outgroup (DNR officials):

> The war has receded from the region, but its echoes continue to remind us of it. Unexploded ammunition, mines and deadly 'tripwires' are scattered about [the

city]. It's quite probable that some people, after leaving the barricades, are keeping military weapons at home. It is also possible that those who supported separatism and were part of the armed militia groups have now returned to the city and are trying to hide their criminal past.[67]

The narrative that emerges from articles discussing the conflict and its aftermath does not focus on reconciliation, but rather on the opposite. Those who participated in the occupation on the side of the DNR are described as "criminal", and a sense of betrayal becomes visible in reports when citizens of Kramatorsk who joined the DNR (openly or in secret) are described.

To analyse the war as it was framed on the pages of *Novosti Kramatorska*, we return to dynamic topic 9 (see table 10 above). *Novosti Kramatorska* journalists reported that there initially was a high degree of scepticism among Kramatorsk residents about the arrival of the Ukrainian army just after the start of the occupation:

On the afternoon of April 15, information came that Ukrainian soldiers landed in the area of the airfield, and that there was shooting going on. Helicopters were flying over the city. All of this indicated that an anti-terrorist operation was being carried out in the city. The situation seriously worried the protesters who are currently holding the building of the executive committee of the city council under their control. In this crowd, rumours began to spread about peaceful civilians being wounded and killed in the area around the airfield. Many people were panicking. To protect unarmed people, many began to call their friends and acquaintances with requests to join the militia and to stop the [Ukrainian] military. Hundreds of Kramatorsk residents joined.[68]

The protesters in the administration buildings were portrayed as local residents who had good reason to fear the Ukrainian army. A regiment of Ukrainian paratroopers from Dnipro (then Dnipropetrovsk) was stopped by a group of locals and not allowed to

[67] Tehnopolis, "SBU Obrashchaetsia K Kramatorchanam," *Www.tehnopolis.com.ua*, September 17, 2014, https://tehnopolis.com.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9277:2014-09-17-13-00-56&catid=59:2011-01-11-21-18-52&Itemid=15.
[68] Novosti Kramatorska, "Mer Kramatorska Nedopustil Provedenie Voennoi Operatsii Protiv Mirnykh Zhitelei," *Novosti Kramatorska*, April 16, 2014, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45872&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.

proceed. It is not clear who these locals were or whom they supported, but *Novosti Kramatorska* pointed out the soldiers' low morale and poor preparation[69]:

> Townspeople continue to detain security forces from Dnipropetrovsk at a railway crossing in the village of Pchelkino. According to sources, at 17:00, 12 armored personnel carriers with Ukrainian paratroopers were still standing still in the village. Despite the soldiers' requests to let them go to Dnipropetrovsk, the citizens reacted skeptically and did not let them leave. Residents of the village fed the soldiers, who, as it turned out, had not eaten for two days.[70]

When the Kramatorsk airfield was recaptured by Ukrainian forces on April 17, this initial scepticism was abandoned[71]. A *Novosti Kramatorska* report about this event called the action a "liberation" (osvobozhdenie), and pointed out that no one was hurt or killed. At the same time, the report is short on detail exactly who the airfield was recaptured from; the DNR or its (ideological) motivations is scarcely mentioned.

Local identity, however, was revisited on occasion. An op-ed in *Novosti Kramatorska* looked back on the battle for the airfield as a moment that put Kramatorsk on the map. The author referenced a "meme" (demotivator) made by an anonymous local resident reflecting a sense of pride in Kramatorsk's position at the centre of attention (see figure 12 below).

[69] Even mentioning that Ukrainian soldiers were deserting to the DNR voluntarily; see Novosti Kramatorska, "'V Kramatorske Na Storonu DNR Pereshli Voennye S Tekhnikoi', - Ochevidets," *Novosti Kramatorska*, April 16, 2014, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45880&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.
[70] Natalia Gurkovskaia, "Dnepropetovskie Voennye, Zablokirovannye Na Pchelkino, Prosiatsia Domoi," *Novosti Kramatorska*, April 16, 2014, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45916&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.
[71] Anna Stepanova, "Kak Proshla Spetsoperatsiia Po Osvobozhdeniiu Aerodroma v Kramatorske," *Novosti Kramatorska*, April 17, 2014, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45931&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.

		10:41:28
А где Донбасс арена находится?		
		10:41:39
в Донецке		
		10:41:48
А где это??		
		10:42:07
рядом с Краматорском		
	★	10:42:49
Ааа.... понял.		
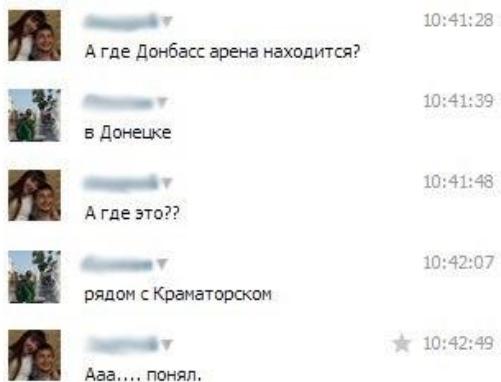
Figure 12: a meme reflecting the newfound fame of Kramatorsk. The text says: "So where is the Donbas Arena located? "In Donetsk". "And where is this??" "Next to Kramatorsk". "Ah right, got it." [72]

The occupation of the city was not over yet, however, as several administration buildings in Kramatorsk were still being occupied by unknown assailants. On April 22, a *Novosti Kramatorska*-journalist managed to talk to a few soldiers who were stationed at the airfield, which was now under Ukrainian control. She describes the chaotic situation in the city:

> Having arrived at the roadblock close to the airfield, a journalist saw a couple dozen Kramatorsk residents, who were brought there after a demonstration on the square [...] Part of them (about 50 people) went to the airfield, and another part, which had separated itself, went to the local city department and began shouting "the police is with the people!". After a few hours, the city department was again occupied by unknown people.[73]

To highlight how *Novosti Kramatorska* readers interacted with this kind of content, one "Serhii Platyna" posted a comment underneath this article which highlights the struggle to reconcile with the fact that the Ukrainian army was now fighting local residents:

> May the arrival of holy Easter dispel the darkness over the city, and people will understand that these paratroopers from Dnipropetrovsk – they are ours. They are our army. They are order and protection. And these vanquished goblins … they are also ours. Our shame.

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[72] Natalia Gurkovskaia, "Chem Kramatorsk Zapomnitsia Vsemu Miru? (VIDEO)," *Novosti Kramatorska*, April 18, 2014, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45969&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.
[73] Anna Stepanova, "Zhurnalist 'NK' pobyval Na KPP Kramatorskogo Aerodroma (FOTO)," *Novosti Kramatorska*, April 22, 2014, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46131&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.

Like in *Tekhnopolis*, the narrative before and during the occupation was ambiguous: on the one hand, there was a sense of embarrassment that some locals had enthusiastically joined the side of the DNR; on the other hand, the DNR was portrayed as an outside occupying force. This ambiguity disappeared after the occupation was over. "Terrorist" became a common term for describing members of the DNR, and articles published in *Novosti Kramatorska* began to openly take sides:

> As a result of cooperation between the SBU and the ATO press centre, hostages from Kramatorsk were released. Yesterday, on August 26, the exchange of prisoners took place. For each DNR fighter, four Ukrainians returned home. Two of them are volunteers from Kramatorsk: Sergei Gakov and Eduard Kulinich. The guys were captured not far from one of the villages in the territory controlled by the terrorists. *Novosti Kramatorska* joins the congratulations and is proud of its countrymen (zemliaki).[74]

After a period of initial ambiguity, during which both Novosti Kramatorsk and *Tekhnopolis* remained on the sidelines in their assessment of the emerging conflict, there was a sudden switch of support during the occupation in favour of Ukraine. This support proved sustainable, and patriotic coverage about the conflict and the army became commonplace.

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[74] Ol'ga Iurasova, "Iz Plena Udalos' Osvobodit' Dvukh Kramatorskikh Volonterov," *Novosti Kramatorska*, August 27, 2014, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=49465&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the topics of discussion in local media before, during and after the 2014 occupation of Kramatorsk; considered how these topics of discussion changed over time; and discussed the function of identity markers, practices, imports, locations and attributes in local media. The occupation of Kramatorsk prompted a long-term narrative shift from a local to a national perspective. In 2013, well before the occupation began, both *Tekhnopolis* and *Novosti Kramatorska* wrote about local affairs without making much reference to Ukraine or Ukrainian identity. During the Euromaidan demonstrations, more and more discussions about local identity and Kramatorsk's place as a Ukrainian city began to appear on the news pages: conflicting viewpoints collided in news articles and op-eds, especially with regards to the ongoing protests, and whether then-president Ianukovych should intervene to end them.

After the occupation, little was left of this initial ambiguity. Ukrainian identity was not only enthusiastically shared and encouraged on the pages of *Novosti Kramatorska* and *Tekhnopolis*, but was also used as a way to distinguish those who remained on the side of Ukraine during the occupation from those who (even temporarily) supported the opposing side. Especially sports coverage took on a political dimension, and became a discursive mechanism for ingroup/outgroup distinction. Identity practices such as cultural celebrations and national holidays went from being part of a local to a national project: representatives of the Ukrainian state and army, and cultural artefacts such as the writer/poet Taras Shevchenko came to be featured in both outlets' coverage. At the same time, the conflict as a topic of discussion receded from view, even as the shift towards national rather than local identity continued. Instead of direct discussions of the conflict on the pages of both news outlets fuelling this shift, the conflict acted as a catalyst, with a greater identification with Ukraine remaining stable even as the conflict itself lost its urgency. These developments offer support for Rogers Brubaker's idea that cataclysmic events (in this case the start of the conflict) allow for identities to "suddenly crystallise" rather than emerge gradually[75].

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[75] Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*.

The discourse focusing on the ingroup conveyed distinctive ideas about itself as part of a nation, whereas the outgroup remained ill-defined in terms of who the outgroup consists of and what its members believe[76]. *Tekhnopolis* and *Novosti Kramatorska* returned to a familiar identity discourse (about Ukraine), rather than searching for a new one. The occupation thus contributed to a stronger identification with previously existing markers related to the Ukrainian nation, its army, and its people.

I have also shown that there was no coherent identity project discernible in newspaper content that underlay the initial phase of the development of the DNR in early 2014. The occupiers did not directly employ the media for purposes of identity construction as a way to generate support (through sports coverage, arts and culture, holidays, or identity rhetoric), despite being in control of what was published. This is in contradiction to what Anthony Smith calls a "primary function" of a budding state, namely the creation of "loyalty based on consent"[77]. "Typical" identity practices such as sports and arts and culture receded from view, but they were not replaced with articles that might promote local people's identification with the occupying authorities. For example, most of the attempts at fostering support for the DNR were focused on economic or practical issues (such as bus fares), and stayed away from using identity discourse to generate support. For example, a word like "Novorossiia" (see chapter 1) is not mentioned in any of the articles published in *Tekhnopolis* during the occupation, and only sporadically in *Novosti Kramatorska* (32 times in total and 0 times during the occupation). In the case of the latter, the term "Novorossiia" was primarily used as a historical term (for example to refer back to the time of the Russian Empire[78], or to refer to the names of DNR-based media outlets)[79]. This is despite the official declaration of the "Novorossiia Confederation" by DNR officials on May 22, 2014[80], and contradicts earlier work on the importance of "Novorossiia" in the early stages of the conflict[81].

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[76] Chan, "(Re)categorizing Intergroup Relations and Social Identities Through News Discourse: The Case of the China Daily's Reporting on Regional Conflict."; Ulrike Hanna Meinhof, Heidi Armbruster, and Craig Rollo, "Identity Discourses on East-West Borders in Europe: An Introduction," in *Living (with) Borders: Identity Discourses on East-West Borders in Europe*, ed. Ulrike Hanna Meinhof, Border Regions Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 1–14, http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA77427635.bib.; Tajfel, "Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations."

[77] See Anthony D Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 257, quoted in Porter, "Sport and National Identity," 479.

[78] Valerii Monaenko, "Segodnia 18 Iiunia, Sreda. Pogoda, Narodnye Primety, Den' v Istorii," *Novosti Kramatorska*, June 18, 2014, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=47746&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.

[79] Valerii Monaenko, "SBU Prosit Zablokirovat' Dva Kramatorskikh Saita. Za Ekstremizm," *Novosti Kramatorska*, August 5, 2014, https://hi.dn.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=48826&catid=55:kramatorsk&Itemid=147.

[80] Babiak, "Welcome to New Russia."

[81] O'Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov, "The Rise and Fall of 'Novorossiya': Examining Support for a Separatist Geopolitical Imaginary in Southeast Ukraine."

Similarly, neither *Tekhnopolis* nor *Novosti Kramatorska* promoted a coherent message about the values and identity of the DNR, Donbas[82], the "Russian World"[83], or the Soviet Union (or a sense of nostalgia for it[84]). Considering the degree of control that DNR officials had over local media at the time of the occupation, it is safe to say that, had identity building been an important element in the DNR's strategy to foster support for its presence, such articles would have appeared in the corpus.

The reasons behind this poverty of identity discourse might be explained in a few ways. One potential explanation is related to this article's data set: only text data was analysed, and visual imagery (posters, billboards, television programmes et cetera) were not taken into account (see the "Limitations" section). It is possible that identity construction took place in other means of mass communication, and not newspapers. A second explanation is that the pre-existing reservoir of commonalities between the DNR and the residents of Kramatorsk was not enough to draw from, something that Sambanis and colleagues argue can be instrumental in the failure to construct a communal identity[85]. Third, it is possible that the DNR authorities were simply not interested in identity construction at the time, and avoided discussions surrounding the topic because the future of the DNR was uncertain. Whether it would be part of a federalised Ukraine, incorporated into the Russian Federation, or established as an "independent" state was not clear between April and July of 2014. Under these circumstances, a full-fledged identity project may have been seen as either premature or not worth the effort. Finally, there is the possibility that journalists working for *Tekhnopolis* and *Novosti Kramatorska* personally disagreed with the occupation and the DNR authorities and exhibited a reluctance to publish content slanted towards the DNR's perspective. This, however, is doubtful, especially considering the amount of pressure exerted on journalists by DNR officials during the occupation, and how easy it was to replace uncooperative journalists with more complacent ones.

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[82] Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870s-1990s.*

[83] O'Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov, "Who Identifies with the 'Russian World'? Geopolitical Attitudes in Southeastern Ukraine, Crimea, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria."

[84] Adam Swain, *Re-Constructing the Post-Soviet Industrial Region: The Donbas in Transition*, BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies (London: Routledge, 2007), https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=P0KAAgAAQBAJ.

[85] Sambanis, Skaperdas, and Wohlforth, "Nation-Building through War," 280.

4 Print media and identity in the DNR and LNR

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore media discourse in the DNR and LNR by analysing the content of 26 local newspapers. The time period under study falls between late 2013, when the Euromaidan demonstrations in Kyiv began, and the end of 2017. For one newspaper (*Makeevskii Rabochii*) I will also include a diachronic analysis of coverage from the time before the events of Euromaidan and Donbas unfolded (between early 2012 and late 2013) until the end of 2017, in order to highlight the contrasts between the periods before and after the start of the conflict.

My purpose here is to uncover the themes and narratives in DNR and LNR print media that relate to identity building. Focusing on local newspapers allows for an examination of content created for the population residing in the territories under DNR and LNR control. Unlike much of the content available on news sites, social media and even television, local newspaper coverage is almost exclusively tailored to local issues and concerns. A local paper's content is organised to be relevant to people in a town, city or region, without external audiences in mind[1]. Particularly in territories like the DNR and LNR, where access to news sources is restricted and the media operate under strict control by the authorities, local news coverage tends to reach only local residents. Examining this content therefore gives insight into the narratives employed by the DNR and LNR authorities to construct a local identity in service of their continued existence as "states", nominally independent from both Ukraine and Russia. I seek to answer the following questions:

- What narratives are present in local DNR and LNR newspapers?
- How do these narratives relate to identity building in the DNR and LNR?

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[1] Douglas Blanks Hindman, "Community Newspapers, Community Structural Pluralism, and Local Conflict with Nonlocal Groups," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (1996): 708–21, https://doi.org/10.1177/107769909607300315.

4.2 Data set

The data set in this chapter is a set of corpora from 26 local newspapers from both the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics. In total, 42.423 news articles were included in the corpus. 21 of these 26 newspapers were designated as "official" media outlets by the authorities of the Donetsk People's Republic. Specifically, the "Respublikanskii Media Kholding" (mentioned in chapter 1) authorised these newspapers to represent the DNR authorities at the local level by attending and reporting on press conferences, publishing statements by DNR officials, et cetera, without being officially state-run. The advantage of examining these newspapers is that they offer insight into the kinds of narratives put forward at the direct behest of the authorities. Additionally, this chapter will look at 5 newspapers which, at least in name, were not formally state-run. While this does not mean that these outlets operated independently from the authorities (which would have been impossible due to the strict regulation of the media in both territories), they did have a significant local readership.

Some outlets in the corpus were founded after the start of the conflict, sometime between November 2014 and mid-2016, as part of the DNR and LNR authorities' efforts to promote homegrown media. Other outlets existed prior to the conflict and continued to operate under the same name, although in many cases the outlet's editorial staff and management underwent significant changes. Still others changed their name when, for instance, the paper's original staff left the region and continued to publish under the same name from Ukrainian-controlled territory.

While the total number of articles across all corpora in this chapter is large and spans almost 3 full years of the history of the DNR and LNR, the total volume of newspaper content published inside the DNR and LNR is much larger. This chapter's data set is therefore limited, for several reasons. First, much of the newspaper content published inside DNR/LNR territories was simply not accessible due to the difficulties accessing the region and the absence of online archival material. Second, some of the material that was available could not be extracted due to webscraping limitations (some websites impose restrictions on what types of data they allow to be scraped). Third, some websites were constructed in such a way that webscraping becomes difficult, for example when the website's internal .html structure is not consistent (webscrapers

need every article to have a similar .html structure to be able to scrape them in large quantities). Fourth, even in cases when the webscraping was successful, not every article that was scraped could be analysed further, as they were incomplete, too short or illegible.

The final sample is therefore all the material that could reasonably be obtained. And while it is not possible to say whether the final sample is representative of the totality of DNR/LNR newspaper content (because the total number of articles published is unknown), it is sufficiently large to be able to extrapolate beyond the sample itself and attempt to draw more general inferences about print media in the DNR and the LNR.

The following 26 newspapers were included in this chapter's final corpus:

- *Boevoe Znamia Donbassa*
    - o A weekly newspaper (circulation of around 2.550) published by the DNR Ministry of Defence. It is the main publication for members of the military, purporting to "provide correct information to the international community, adequately cover ongoing events for the population of the Republic, and [produce] the timely dissemination of operations-related information among service members".[2]

- *Debal'tsevskie Vesti*
    - o This paper was founded in mid-2016 as a replacement for the old *Tribuna*-newspaper in Debaltsevo. It is run by editor-in-chief Nelly Saidini, and has a circulation of around 1.000.[3]

- *Donetsk Vechernii*
    - o A long-running newspaper based in Donetsk. On June 2, 2014, its then-editor-in-chief Leonid Lapa was arrested by DNR officials and interrogated and held captive for several hours. The newspaper's office was heavily damaged. Lapa was forced to retire. In October 2015, the

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[2] Boevoe Znamia Donbassa, "Vas privetstvuet 'Boevoe Znamia Donbassa'!," *Boevoe Znamia Donbassa*, November 13, 2014, http://novopressa.ru/uploads/BZD/GazetaBZD_1.pdf.
[3] Online Debal'tsevo, "Obzor Agitatsionnoi Pressy v Debal'tsevo," *Www.debaltsevo.com*, September 24, 2016, https://debaltsevo.com/news/2016-09-24-1875.

paper resumed publication under Mikhail Kononenko and received accreditation to operate as an "official" DNR newspaper.[4]

- *Enakievskii Rabochii*
  - A weekly newspaper from Enakievo that began publication in March 2015. It is run by editor-in-chief A.A. Pologovoi as an "official" DNR newspaper.[5]
- *Golos Respubliki*
  - An "official" Donetsk-based weekly newspaper run by editor-in-chief Rostislav Shinkarenko. It is linked to a website, *Golos Naroda*.[6]
- *Iasinovatskii Vestnik DNR*
  - An "official" newspaper from Iasinovataia, run by editor-in-chief Vitalii Korablev. It had been unable to operate between the start of the conflict and September 2015, after which it resumed publication.[7]
- *Informatsionnyi Biulleten' Dokuchaevsk*
  - This paper is the official bulletin for the Dokuchaevsk city administration. Up until December 2015, it had a circulation of around 500, until it suspended its regular publication for unknown reasons.[8]
- *Kazachii Vestnik*
  - A Luhansk-based newspaper that falls under the "Kazach'a Media Gruppa", which includes outlets like *Kazach'e Radio*, *Kazachiy Vestnik* and the TV channel *Novyi Kanal Novorossii*. Its founder, Pavel Dremov, also a commander in the LNR army, was killed in a car explosion on December 12, 2015. The paper had a circulation of around 5.500.[9]
- *Kochegarka DNR*
  - A newspaper in Gorlovka originally called *Kochegarka*. In May 2014 its employees resigned in protest of the DNR's takeover. On May 3, 2015,

[4] Administratsiia Goroda Donetska, "V Kalininskom Raione Pozdravili Redaktsiu gazety 'Donetsk Vechernii,'" *Www.gorod-Donetsk.com*, May 6, 2016, http://gorod-donetsk.com/novosti/5635-v-kalininskom-rajone-pozdravili-redaktsiyu-gazety-donetsk-vechernij.
[5] Gorlovka.ua, "Telekanaly, Gazety I Saity v Okkupirovannykh Gorodakh Donbassa: Kto Govorit I Pokazyvaet v Enakievo, Debal'tsevo, Toreze? (Chast' 1)," *Www.gorlovka.ua*, September 20, 2016, http://gorlovka.ua/news/article/10457/.
[6] Donetskaia Narodnaia Respublika - Glava Respubliki, "Rasporiazhenie Glavy Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki 'O Pooshchrenii'" (2016), https://av-zakharchenko.su/documents/rasporiazh/2016/rasporiazhGlavaN58_05052016.pdf.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Dokuchaevskii gorodskoi otdel Iustitsii, "Sozdan Dokuchaevskii Otdel Tekhnicheskoi Inventarizatsii," *Www.dokuchaevskga.ucoz.org*, February 2, 2016, http://dokuchaevskga.ucoz.org/news/sozdan_dokuchaevskij_otdel_tekhnicheskoj_inventarizacii/2016-02-02-302.
[9] Dmitrii Kirillov and Vladimir Dergachev, "'Batia' ne Doekhal Do Svad'by," *Novaya Gazeta*, December 12, 2015, https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2015/12/12_a_7962323.shtml#.

the paper resumed publication under the old name and banner, slightly renaming it to *Kochegarka DNR*.[10]

- *Makeevskii Rabochii DNR*
  - One of the largest newspapers published inside DNR/LNR territory, with a circulation of around 11.000 prior to the start of the conflict. After the DNR takeover in June 2014, publication was suspended and then-editor-in-chief Mariia Semenova was fired. It resumed publication in October 2014, rebranding itself as *Makeevskii Rabochii DNR* and becoming an "official" DNR newspaper.[11]

- *Nashe Vremia*
  - A weekly newspaper from Dokuchaevsk, with a circulation of around 1.050. It began publication on September 1, 2016 as an "official" DNR newspaper.[12]

- *Narodnaia Tribuna*
  - The first pro-DNR print publication in Debaltsevo, run by the Ukrainian language teacher Tat'iana Ochapovskaia. After a few editions, it was taken out of print and replaced by *Debal'tsevskie Vesti*.[13]

- *Novaia Niva*
  - A newspaper based in Tel'manovo run by editor-in-chief Natalia Zubach. It was founded in early 2015 with the help of the DNR Ministry of Information, and has since become an "official" outlet. It had a circulation between 1.500 and 2.180 in 2016.[14]

- *Novaia Zhizn'*
  - A weekly newspaper published in and around Starobeshevo, run by editor-in-chief Alina Kosse. It was originally founded in 1932 as *Sotsialiticheskaia Pobeda*, but took on the name *Novaia Zhizn'* in 1963. Under DNR rule, it became an "official" newspaper.[15]

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[10] Vladislav Leoshko, "'Ranshe Pressu Pressovali - Teper' 'otzhimaiut," *Www.nsju.org*, April 6, 2015, http://www.nsju.org/article/4859.
[11] Vremia Chitat', "Makeevskii Rabochii," время-читать.рф, 2019, http://время-читать.рф/макеевский-рабочий-днр/.
[12] Gosudarstvennoe Predpriatie "Pochta Donbassa," "Nashe Vremia - Ezhenedel'naia Gazeta Goroda Dokuchaevska," www.postdonbass.com, 2017, https://postdonbass.com/periodicheskie_izdaniya/nashe-vremya.
[13] Gorlovka.ua, "Telekanaly, Gazety I Saity v Okkupirovannykh Gorodakh Donbassa: Kto Govorit I Pokazyvaet v Enakievo, Debal'tsevo, Toreze? (Chast' 1)."
[14] Natal'ia Zubach, "Kurskaia Zemlia Kak Ona Est': Glazami Delegatsii Iz Donbassa," *Www.formator.info*, July 20, 2016, http://formator.info/m_Article?id=21043&saved=1&m=yes.
[15] Spravochnik DNR, "Novaia Zhizn' (Starobeshevo)," www.spravochnik.vsednr.ru, 2019, http://spravochnik.vsednr.ru/spr/novaya-zhizn/.

- *Novorossia*
  - A Donetsk-based newspaper that began publication in June 2014 under the auspices of former "People's Governor" of the DNR, Pavel Gubarev. It was then taken over by editor-in-chief Dmitri Dezortsev. There was also an actively publishing news site.[16]

- *Novye Gorizonty*
  - A relatively small newspaper in Kirovskoe with a circulation between 2.050 and 3.500, run by editor-in-chief Liliia Starushenko. Its first issue was published in January 2016, after which it became an "official" DNR outlet.[17]

- *Novyi Luch*
  - A weekly newspaper distributed in Novyi Luch and Amvrosivka with a circulation between 1.000 and 2.350, run by editor-in-chief Regina Gadyeva. It began publishing in early 2015 and became an "official" DNR outlet.[18]

- *Rodina*
  - An "official" newspaper in Khartsyzsk with a circulation of around 5.000, run by Sergei Pavlienko. Its first issue was published in 1936.[19]

- *Rodnoe Priazov'e*
  - An "official" newspaper in Novoazovsk with a circulation of 3.650. Editor-in-chief Sergei Shvedko had harboured pro-Russian sympathies since before the events of 2014. In 2014, he directed his newspaper to publish reports calling for a Donbas independence referendum. After Novoazovsk was recaptured by Ukrainian forces, he fled to Kuban' in Russia. When the city was subsequently recaptured by DNR separatists, he was able to return.[20]

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[16] Novorossia, "Kontaktnaia Informatsiia," www.novopressa.ru, 2019, http://novopressa.ru/contacts.html.
[17] Spravochnik DNR, "Novye Gorizonty (Kirovskoe)," www.spravochnik.vsednr.ru, 2019, http://spravochnik.vsednr.ru/spr/novye-gorizonty/.
[18] Spravochnik DNR, "Novyi Luch (Amvrosievskii Raion)," www.spravochnik.vsednr.ru, 2019, http://spravochnik.vsednr.ru/spr/novyj-luch/.
[19] Spravochnik DNR, "Rodina (Khartsyzsk)," www.spravochnik.vsednr.ru, 2019, http://spravochnik.vsednr.ru/spr/rodina/.
[20] Aleksandr Vlasenko, ""My Zhili Kak v Okkupatsii'. Zhurnalist S Donbassa Izbezhal Zastenok SBU," *Www.aif.ru*, October 5, 2016, http://www.aif.ru/society/people/my_zhili_kak_v_okkupacii_zhurnalist_s_donbassa_izbezhal_zastenok_sbu.

- *Snezhnianskie Novosti*
  - This is the "official" DNR newspaper in the city of Snezhnoe, run by Olga Vasil'eva and Oleg Koronev. It began publishing in December 2014, with a circulation of 3.250.[21]

- *Torezskii Gorniak*
  - A long-running, now "official" newspaper from Torez. On May 6 2014, DNR officials entered the *Gorniak* offices and damaged it, warning the journalists present to change their editorial line, which they refused. On June 6, 2014, on a local holiday called the "Day of the Journalist", separatists came into the office and burned it down. The post of editor-in-chief was then taken over by Anna Mititela.[22]

- *Vash Ilovaisk*
  - An "official" DNR newspaper founded in April 2016 covering events in the DNR and the town of Ilovaisk. It had 3 employees in 2016: editor-in-chief Ol'ga Babych, a journalist, and an accountant.[23]

- *Vestnik DNR*
  - A free Donetsk-based newspaper run by editor-in-chief Valerii Gerlandets. Gerlandets also moonlighted as a poet, publishing among other things a volume of poems entitled "Donbas in My Heart".[24]

- *XpressKlub*
  - A commercial-heavy newspaper from Luhansk, also distributed in surrounding cities. It is part of a larger conglomerate of newspapers including *Ekspress Novosti*, *Mir Novostei* and *RIO-Plius*. It had a circulation of around 3.000 throughout Luhansk Oblast, and has been publishing continuously since the early 1990s. It is run by Liudmila Kulinchenko.[25]

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[21] Spravochnik DNR, "Snezhianskie Novosti," www.spravochnik.vsednr.ru, 2019, http://spravochnik.vsednr.ru/spr/snezhnyanskie-novosti/.

[22] Novosti Donbassa, "Budni 'DNR': V Toreze Sozhgli Ofis gazety 'Gorniak.'"; Horodetskii, "Torezskuiu gazetu 'Gorniak' razgromili Separatisty."; Pro Gorod, "Na Sleduiushchii Den' Posle Pogroma v Redaktsii gazety 'Gorniak' g. Torez," www.youtube.com, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOYrAp7DuuA.

[23] Informatsionnoe Soprotivlenie, "V Ilovaiske Zapustili Propagandistskuiu Gazetu Dlia Zapudrivaniia Mozgov Mestnym Zhiteliam, - IS," *Www.sprotyv.info*, April 23, 2016, https://sprotyv.info/news/v-ilovajske-zapustili-propagandistskuju-gazetu-dlja-zapudrivanija-mozgov-mestnym-zhiteljam-is.

[24] Larisa Vasil'evna Mel'nikova, "Literatura Rodnogo Kraia: V.I. Gerlanets," kabruss.blogspot.com, 2016, http://kabruss.blogspot.com/2016/12/blog-post_38.html.

[25] Xpress-Klub, "'Ekspress-Klub' - Vash Nadezhnyi Partner v Biznese!," www.xpressclub.ru, 2019, http://xpressclub.ru/about/paper/.

- *XXI Vek*
  - A large daily newspaper in and around Luhansk with a circulation of around 25.000. It was run by Iurii Iurov, the former press secretary of Aleksandr Efremov, the former governor of Luhansk Oblast. It was the first newspaper to obtain an official accreditation from the new authorities in the LNR, in July 2015.[26]
- *Znamia Pobedy*
  - A newspaper based in the town of Shakhtersk run by editor-in-chief Liudmila Polianskaia, with a circulation of around 3.750. The first edition of the paper came out on May 9, 1946, in commemoration of the USSR's victory over Nazi Germany.[27]

This chapter relies on both static and dynamic topic models to categorise the various corpora and extract thematic patterns from a large volume of DNR and LNR newspaper articles. Table 11 below contains the list of newspapers in the corpus, along with the number of articles and words in each topic, the optimal number of topics, and the coherence score[28].

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[26] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Gazeta 'XXI Vek' stala Pervym Izdaniem, Zaregistrirovannym v LNR," *Www.lug-Info.com*, July 8, 2015, http://lug-info.com/news/one/gazeta-xxi-vek-stala-pervym-zaregistrirovannym-v-lnr-izdaniem-4647.
[27] Spravochnik DNR, "Znamia Pobedy (Shakhtersk)," www.spravochnik.vsednr.ru (Donetsk, 2019), http://spravochnik.vsednr.ru/spr/znamya-pobedy/.
[28] The full corpus and topic models can be found in the supplement to this dissertation (files 4.2 through 4.8).

Newspaper name	No. of articles	Word count	No. of topics	Model coherence
Boevoe Znamia Donbassa	67	44439		
Debal'tsevskie Vesti	67	22109		
Donetsk Vechernii	252	194936	12	0.8318
Enakievskii Rabochii	446	170089	11	0.7700
Golos Respubliki	822	415805	10	0.5744
Informatsionnyi Biulleten' Dokuchaevsk	29	4401		
Iasinovatskii Vestnik DNR	18	9359		
Kazachii Vestnik	1302	515540	16	0.5994
Kochegarka DNR	544	148228	13	0.7684
Makeevskii Rabochii	7246	960065	18	0.5838
Narodnaia Tribuna	6	1772		
Nashe Vremia	29	4401		
Novaia Niva	1644	452274	14	0.5960
Novaia Zhizn'	741	307346	14	0.6893
Novorossiia	169	170274	7	0.9233
Novye Gorizonty	272	70048	9	0.8931
Novyi Luch	553	178265	14	0.8120
Rodina	1008	459671	14	0.6644
Rodnoe Priazov'e	926	287178	15	0.7508
Snezhnianskie Novosti	1277	480181	15	0.6024
Torezskii Gorniak	190	47259	14	0.9894
Vash Ilovaisk	273	102055	8	0.9044
Vestnik DNR	318	180045	11	0.8087
XpressKlub	19543	1099793	18	0.4542
XXI Vek	3758	1006154	4	0.4735
Znamia Pobedy	923	362481	15	0.6963
Total	**42423**	**7694168**	**252**	
Average	1631.65	295929.54	12.60	0.7193
Median	495	179155	14	0.7236

Table 11: Corpora and descriptive statistics

6 corpora were too small for conducting a reliable topic model, as explained in the "data preparation" section. They were excluded from the quantitative analysis, although the content of the articles was consulted for purposes of qualitative analysis. Although the resulting topic models offered decent preliminary insight into the themes and narratives present in each corpus, this was only the first step. The next step involved grouping topics and clusters of topics together into themes, and themes into narratives. These steps were conducted manually. Relevant individual news articles are cited where relevant in the discussion below.

4.3 Results & discussion

A total of 252 topics were extracted across 26 corpora. These topics were grouped together into 12 themes: war (with the subtheme "humanitarian aid"), ingroup identity, Ukraine, sports, culture, education & children, home & garden, politics, local administration, local economy, and crime. These themes were then compiled into three main narratives: "business as usual", war and memory, and loss and guilt. Figure 13 shows this process from corpus to narratives schematically. I will elaborate on each of the three narratives below.
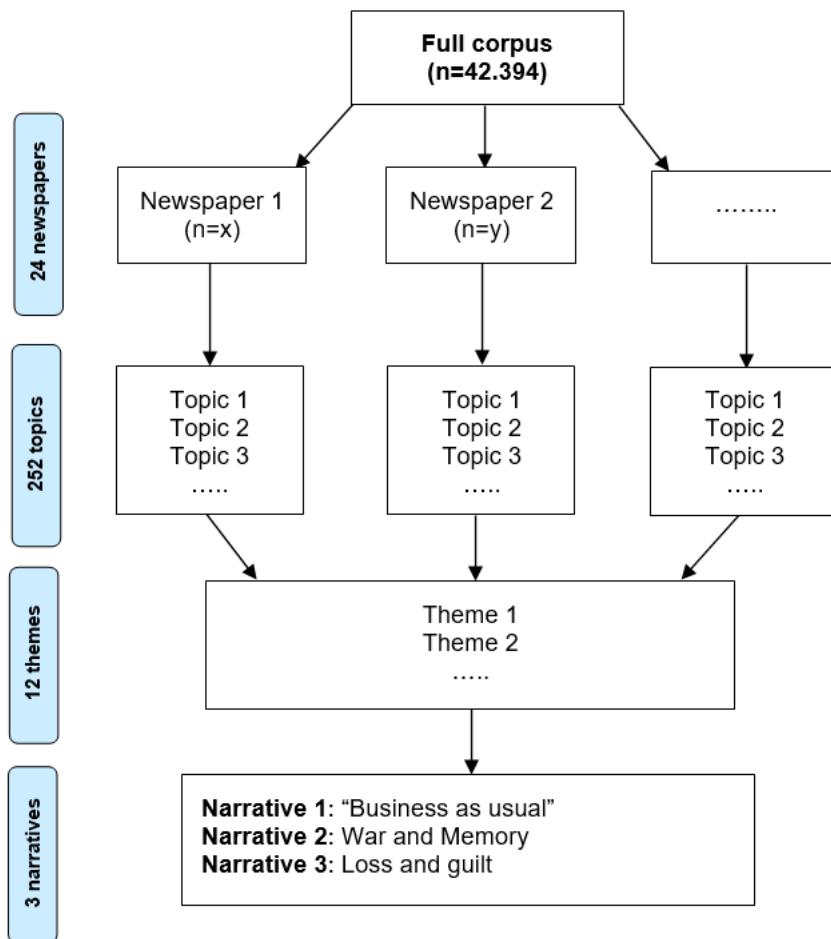
Figure 13: Schematic overview of narrative analysis in DNR/LNR newspapers

4.3.1 "Business as usual"

"Business as usual" is a term I use to denote themes that fall under the traditional function of local newspapers – namely, to chronicle local issues and events like sports, culture, the economy and local politics[29]. How locally relevant events are discussed in newspapers is informative of how local identity is expressed[30]. Two key points are relevant here: *how* events only relevant to the local population are framed and discussed (e.g. with or without the use of identity discourse), and the *proportion* of such themes within the rest of the corpus. In DNR and LNR newspapers, there are 7 themes that fall under the "business as usual" narrative[31]:

- Sports (17 topics across 13 newspapers)

- Culture (10 topics across 10 newspapers)

- Education and children (22 topics across 15 newspapers)

- Home and garden (10 topics across 7 newspapers)

- Crime (9 topics across 9 newspapers)

- Local administration (37 topics across 17 newspapers)

- Local economy (22 topics across 14 newspapers)

These 7 themes comprise 127 out of 252 topics in the corpus (50.1%; see table 11). A casual reader of DNR and LNR newspapers would thus primarily read articles about everyday topics that relate to mundane issues like the weather. This function runs counter to the idea of the DNR and LNR authorities using local newspapers almost exclusively for purposes of direct propaganda. Instead, most discourse was aimed at projecting a sense of "business as usual". As I will explain below, these themes are not typically infused with identity discourse, lending support to the idea that the newspapers in the corpus continued to perform their roles as "typical" local newspapers[32], comparable to local newspapers outside of conflict zones. Nonetheless, articles that fall under one of the above themes are not entirely devoid of identity discourse, so I will unpack them further.

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[29] Hindman, "Community Newspapers, Community Structural Pluralism, and Local Conflict with Nonlocal Groups."
[30] Montiel et al., "Nationalism in Local Media During International Conflict: Text Mining Domestic News Reports of the China–Philippines Maritime Dispute."
[31] Supplement, file 4.1.
[32] Hindman, "Community Newspapers, Community Structural Pluralism, and Local Conflict with Nonlocal Groups."

Football and sports tournaments (most prominently boxing and chess) were the major topics of discussion related to sports in DNR and LNR newspapers. Table 12 on the next page shows the topics (from left to right) per newspaper; we note the prevalence of terms like "team" (komanda), "competition" or "game" (sorevnovanie), "championship" (chempionat), "tournament" (turnir), "football" (futbol), as well as the names of various towns (Enakievo, Makeevka, Gorlovka).

Newspapers in the DNR and LNR dedicate a great deal of space to local football. Soon after taking over, the DNR and LNR authorities began to organise football competitions, despite the ongoing hostilities[33]. Luhansk was first. The Luhansk Football Union (Luganskii Futbol'nyi Soiuz) was established in October 2014, and the LNR "national" team played its first match against Abkhaziia in March 2015. June of that year marked the start of the LNR football league, in which 6 teams took part (SK Zaria Stal' from Luhansk, LGU (Luganskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet) from Luhansk, Gorniak from Roven'ki, Shakter from Sverdlovs'k, Shakhter from Krasnyi Luch, and FK Krasnodon. SK Zaria Stal' won the competition with an 18 point difference[34].

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[33] Informatsionnyi Biulleten' Dokuchaevsk, "Spartakiadad 'Zdorovaia Molodezh' - Dostoianie Respubliki,'" *Informatsionnyi Biulleten' Dokuchaevsk*, September 30, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=5232.
[34] Inna Bessonova, "Futbol v 'DNR-LNR': Patriotichno, Nezavisimo, Pechal'no," *www.112.ua*, October 31, 2015, https://112.ua/statji/futbol-v-dnr-lnr-patriotichno-nezavisimo-pechalno-267785.html.; Aleksei Svetikov, "V 'LNR' startoval Chempionat Po Futbolu. S uchastiem...'Zari,'" *Segodnia v Severodonetske*, June 16, 2015, http://svsever.lg.ua/2015/06/v_lnr_startoval_chempionat_po_futbolu._s_uchastiem..._zari_.

Newspaper & topic no.	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8	Term 9	Term 10
Donetsk Vechernii-02	Oplot (oplot)	victory (pobed-)	championship (chempionat)	team (komand-)	game (igr-)	match (match)	football (futbol)	ball (miach)	half (taim)	Donbas
Donetsk Vechernii-05	tournament (turnir)	sports (sport-)	competition (sorevnovan-)	team (komand-)	championship (chempionat)	champion (chempion)	sports (adj.) (sportivn-)	club (klub)	federation (federats-)	youth (molodezh-)
Enakievskii Rabochii-02	competition (sorevnovan-)	sports (sport-)	place (mest-)	youth sports schools (DIuSSh)	sports (adj.) (sportivn-)	athlete (sportsmen)	coach (trener)	youth (iunosh-)	tourism (turizm)	athlete (sportsm-)
Enakievskii Rabochii-05	team (komand-)	game (igr-)	score (schet)	round (tur)	match (match)	minute (min-)	football (futbol)	stadium (stadion)	victory (pobed-)	Enakievo (enakiev-)
Golos Respubliki-07	team (komand-)	sports (sport-)	competition (sorevnovan-)	youth (molodezh-)	sports (adj.) (sportivn-)	tourism (turizm)	tournament (turnir)	Donetsk	DNR	Makeevka (makeevk-)
Kochegarka DNR-04	place (mest-)	competition (sorevnovan-)	sports (sport-)	tournament (turnir)	Wednesday (sred-)	coach (trener)	Donetsk	tourism (turizm)	sports (adj.) (sportivn-)	athlete (sportsmen)
Kochegarka DNR-10	team (komand-)	match (match)	game (igr-)	tournament (turnir)	score (schet)	football (futbol)	Enakievo	Gorlovka (adj.) (gorlovsk-)	institute (institut)	victory (pobed-)
Novaia Niva-03	team (komand-)	competition (sorevnovan-)	place (mest-)	to occupy (zania-)	sports (sport-)	tournament (turnir)	prizewinner (prizer)	second (vtor-)	coach (trener)	Wednesday (sred-)
Novaia Zhizn'-07	team (komand-)	competition (sorevnovan-)	sports (sport-)	stage (etap-)	sports (adj.) (sportivn-)	to occupy (zania-)	youth (molodezh-)	place (mest-)	victor (pobeditel-)	degree (stupen-)
Novye Gorizonty-04	team (komand-)	competition (sorevnovan-)	sports (sport-)	youth (molodezh-)	tourism (turizm)	place (mest-)	sports (adj.) (sportivn-)	place (mest-)	game (igr-)	tournament (turnir)
Novyi Luch-06	team (komand-)	competition (sorevnovan-)	tournament (turnir)	boxing (boks-)	game (igr-)	place (mest-)	place (mest-)	to occupy (zania-)	to occupy (zania-)	our (nash-)
Rodina-02	team (komand-)	place (mest-)	competition (sorevnovan-)	sports (sport-)	tournament (turnir)	coach (trener)	Khartsyzsk	to occupy (zania-)	Donetsk	Wednesday (sred-)
Rodnoe Priazov'e-14	team (komand-)	competition (sorevnovan-)	sports (sport-)	place (mest-)	sports (adj.) (sportivn-)	youth (molodezh-)	game (igr-)	to occupy (zania-)	sports (adj.) (sportivn-)	first (perv-)
Sneznianskie Novosti-06	team (komand-)	competition (sorevnovan-)	place (mest-)	sports (sport-)	sports (adj.) (sportivn-)	youth sports schools (DIuSSh)	to occupy (zania-)	category (kategor-)	football (futbol)	coach (trener)
Torezskii Gorniak-03	team (komand-)	competition (sorevnovan-)	sports (adj.) (sportivn-)	tourism (turizm)	youth sports schools (DIuSSh)	Spartakiad (spartakiad)	strike (ud-)	sports (sport-)	place (mest-)	game (igr-)
Torezskii Gorniak-04	category (kategor-)	place (mest-)	weight (adj.) (vesov-)	youth (iunosh-)	to occupy (zania-)	coach (trener)	Wednesday (sred-)	weigh (ves-)	championship (chempionat)	youth sports schools (DIuSSh)
Znamia Pobedy-02	team (komand-)	sports (sport-)	competition (sorevnovan-)	youth (molodezh-)	tourism (turizm)	sports (adj.) (sportivn-)	coach (trener)	tournament (turnir)	place (mest-)	game (igr-)

Table 12: Topics related to sports. The name of each newspaper plus the relevant topic number are displayed in the left column. From left to right are the top 10 terms per topic.

The DNR's "national" football team was established somewhat later than the LNR's, in April 2015. It played its first "official" match, also against Abkhaziia, in May of that year. Its first football league took place in 2016, with 8 participating teams: Pobeda and Oplot Donbassa from Donetsk, OD Donetskaia Respublika and Berkut from Makeevka, Khimik from Gorlovka, Mospino-UOR from Mospino, FK Khartsyzk, and FK Snezhnoe. Pobeda won the title 11 points ahead of the number two, OD Donetskaia Respublika[35] [36]. Both the DNR and LNR also organised annual cup tournaments and "international" matches against each other and other unrecognised entities such as Abkhaziia and South Ossetia. Unlike in *Tekhnopolis* and *Novosti Kramatorska* in the previous chapter, match reports in DNR and LNR newspapers were not typically terse and descriptive[37]; rather than merely describing the matches themselves, articles also included additional information about the event's political relevance:

> On Sunday, November 8, the final match of the season was held between FC Oplot Donbassa and FC Vostok. FC Oplot Donbassa took home the victory with a score of 2-0. The following guests of honour came to support the team, which is a symbol of athleticism: the head of the Donetsk city administration, the president of FC Oplot Donbassa, Igor Martynov, members of the People's Council Anatolii Koval', Viktor Petrovich, Oleg Stepanov, Iurii Martynov and German Kadyrov, as well as the commander of the 'Somalia'[38] battalion, lieutenant-colonel Mikhail Tolstykh (Givi).[39]

In other cases, football tournaments (especially for children) were organised as part of holiday celebrations, such as on the day of the Metallurgists and Miners[40]:

> The Day of Metallurgists and Miners (den' metallurga i gorniaka) is one of [Enakievo]'s favourite holidays. For the last two years it has been celebrated in

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[35] Futbol'nyi Soiuz Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki, "Chempionat DNR Sezon 2016," www.fsdnr.com, 2019, http://fsdnr.com/chempionat-dnr/chempionat-dnr-2016.

[36] Bessonova, "Futbol v 'DNR-LNR': Patriotichno, Nezavisimo, Pechal'no."

[37] See for example Znamia Pobedy, "Ocherednaia Pobeda!," *Znamia Pobedy*, September 4, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=3011.

[38] The 'Somalia' battalion (Batal'on "Somali") is one of the military units fighting under the DNR banner. Its commander, Mikhail Tolstykh, who was killed in February 2017 by a rocket explosion, stated that the battalion got its name because its members were as "fearless as Somalis" Lucian Kim, "The Battle of Ilovaisk: Details of a Massacre Inside Rebel-Held Eastern Ukraine," *Newsweek*, April 11, 2014, https://www.newsweek.com/2014/11/14/battle-ilovaisk-details-massacre-inside-rebel-held-eastern-ukraine-282003.html..

[39] Golos Respubliki, "Bor'ba Za Kubki Zavershilas'," *Golos Respubliki*, November 12, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=9433.

[40] See also: Narodnaia Tribuna, "S Dnem Metallurga, Debal'chane!," *Narodnaia Tribuna*, August 8, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=1113.

an especially big way. On July 16, a grandiose sports tournament was held at the Metallurg Stadium among teams assembled at various industrial plants of the Republic. Athletes from the Enakievo Metallurgical Plant (EMZ), the Makeevka branch of the EMZ, the Khartsyzsk pipe factory, the Komsomol'sk Mineral Directorate, Industrial Technologies LLC, and the Enakievo Metallurgical College battled it out for the palm branch.[41]

Other sports tournaments were also organised starting relatively soon after the outbreak of the conflict. Chess tournaments[42], boxing (although there was a lack of proper equipment and available funding throughout 2016 and 2017, according to the head of the DNR boxing federation[43]), ice hockey[44] and volleyball[45] matches were held in the DNR and LNR starting in 2015. Sports federations were established or re-established soon after the start of the conflict. As Bessonova argues, this was done to give structure to the comings and goings of everyday life[46]. When all Ukrainian television channels were taken off the air in Donetsk in August 2014, a massive outcry prompted the authorities to quickly resume the broadcasting of sports channels *Futbol-1* and *Futbol-2*. The prominent role that the sports pages continued to play in DNR and LNR newspapers can be explained by their pacifying potential: being able to play and watch sports games as usual could contribute to people's acceptance of the new status quo.

Identity practices take shape in various topics across the corpora in the form of reports about theatre performances, cultural festivals, song contests, folk music and dance recitals[47]. These articles tend to be rather factual and not go into detail about the cultural significance of such events for DNR or LNR identity[48]. A typical article would start more or less as follows:

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[41] Enakievskii Rabochii, "Metallurgi: Sportsmeny I Truzheniki," *Enakievskii Rabochii*, July 25, 2016, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=37099.

[42] Evgenii Mitin, "Osobennosti Shakhmatnoi Biografii Donbassa," *Donetskoe Vremia*, November 16, 2016, http://dnr-news.com/pressa/37081-osobennosti-shahmatnoy-biografii-donbassa.html.

[43] Donetskie Novosti, "Boks v 'DNR': My Eshche Ni Razu Ne Ekipirovali Nashikh Rebiat, Net Deneg," *Www.dnews.dn.ua*, July 17, 2017, https://www.dnews.dn.ua/news/631259.

[44] Donetskie Novosti, "'Prezident Federatsii Khokkeia DNR' promenial 'respubliku' na Rossiiu," *Www.dnews.dn.ua*, October 2, 2017, https://dnews.dn.ua/news/649547.

[45] Ministerstvo Kul'tury Sporta i Molodezhi Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki, "Edinyi Kalendarnyi Plan Respublikanskikh Fizkul'turnykh I Sportivnykh Meropriiatii Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki Na 2019 God," www.mklnr.su, 2019, https://mklnr.su/ekp-sport-2019.html.

[46] Bessonova, "Futbol v 'DNR-LNR': Patriotichno, Nezavisimo, Pechal'no."

[47] Informatsionnyi Biulleten' Dokuchaevsk, "I v Dokuchaevske Est' svoi 'Zolotoi Golos,'" *Informatsionnyi Biulleten' Dokuchaevsk*, November 19, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=10833.

[48] Torezskii Gorniak, "Predstaviteli Rossiiskoi Federatsii Vruchili Nagradu Kollektivu Donetskoi Muzdramy," *Torezskii Gorniak*, April 4, 2016, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=27225.

On March 13, the Donetsk State Academic Music and Drama Theatre welcomed guests from the Russian Federation: the Chernyshev family musical collective, the composer and singer Sergei Svetlov, and the documentary film director Aleksandr Belanov. The 'Russian Soul' duet (Mariia and Sofiia Chernyshev, plus their parents) have performed in 35 countries to promote Russian folk music. The girls previously performed in Luhansk, and during the Maslenitsa festivities came to entertain the people of our city with their creativity.[49]

It is relevant to note that while the dance ensemble is called "Russian Soul" (russkaia dusha) and performs Russian folk music, the article itself does not elaborate on the cultural resonance that these concepts may possess within the DNR; local identity practices were thus mentioned in articles about cultural events, but not explored in detail. The same can be said for the theme "education and children"; one could imagine that newspapers would discuss, for example, curriculum reform or the importance of instilling the values and identity of the DNR/LNR into local children via the education system. But such articles are rare. Rather, topics of discussion centred around this theme include reading clubs[50], summer camps for children[51], and scientific research[52]. Similarly, articles under the "home and garden" theme include food recipes[53], growing crops at home[54], weather reports[55], animals[56], and outbreaks of common illnesses[57]. The theme of "crime", meanwhile, mainly covers "terrorists" being apprehended for impersonating army officers and carrying heavy weaponry[58]. Other common articles are weekly crime reports containing crime statistics and descriptions of instances of grand theft auto, theft, destruction of property, and drug offences[59]. All of these are "typical[60]" topics for local newspapers, not infused with identity rhetoric.

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Znamia Pobedy, "Iz Raznotsvet'ia Bisera Tvoriatsia Chudesa," *Znamia Pobedy*, August 21, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=1950.
[51] Novye Gorizonty, "Kanikuly S Pol'zoi," *Novye Gorizonty*, August 6, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=723.
[52] Znamia Pobedy, "Poluchit' Professiiu, Ne Pokidaia Gorod...," *Znamia Pobedy*, August 7, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=855.
[53] Iasinovatskii Vestnik, "Oda Ob Orekhe," *Iasinovatskii Vestnik*, December 9, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=13904.
[54] Znamia Pobedy, "Ne Zarasti Travoi," *Znamia Pobedy*, August 7, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=864.,
[55] XXI Vek, "Sinoptiki Prognoziruiut 28 Marta v LNR Do 11 Gradusov Tepla, Mestami Dozhd' so Snegom," *XXI Vek*, March 28, 2017, http://xxiveklnr.su/novosti/37-sinoptiki-prognoziruyut-28-marta-v-lnr-do-11-gradusov-tepla-mestami-dozhd-so-snegom.html.
[56] Snezhnianskie Novosti, "Vsemirnyi Den' Bor'by S Beshenstvom. Beshenstvo! Chto Nuzhno Znat'?," *Snezhnianskie Novosti*, September 25, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=4822.
[57] Makeevskii Rabochii, "Istsepit' Rasteniem," *Makeevskii Rabochii*, September 1, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=2608.
[58] Rodina, "Khartsyzsk: Operativno," *Rodina*, August 7, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=809.
[59] Rodina, "Khartsyzsk: Operativno (Nomer Za 20-26 Avgusta)," *Rodina*, August 21, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=2011.
[60] Janowitz, *The Community Press in an Urban Setting: The Social Elements of Urbanism*.

Table 13 on the next page shows the topics that relate to the local administration, including pensions (e.g. see Donetsk Vechernii-04, Kozachii Vestnik-07, Novyi Luch-03), government services (e.g. Kochegarka DNR-05, Kozachii Vestnik-14, Novye Gorizonty-06, Snezhianskie Novosti-02), taxes (e.g. Enakievskii Rabochii-08), public transportation (Golos Respubliki-08, Novaia Niva-05, Rodnoe Priazov'e-05, Torezskii Gorniak-14), and incidents such as house fires to be addressed by the authorities (Enakievskii Rabochii-10, Novaia Zhizn'-13).

Newspaper & topic no.	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8	Term 9	Term 10
Donetsk Vechernii-03	area (raion)	utilities (kommunal'shchik)	commission (komiss-)	communal (kommunal'n-)	work (rabot-)	contest (konkurs)	street (ulits-)	house (dom)	contest (adj.) (konkursn-)	maintenance (remont)
Donetsk Vechernii-04	pensions (pens-)	pension (pension-)	payment (vyplat-)	pensioner (pensioner)	appointment (naznachen-)	age (vozrast)	inquiry (spravk-)	fund (fond)	invalid (adj.) (invalidn-)	document (dokument)
Enakievskii Rabochii-03	trade (torgovl-)	administration (administrats-)	arpoindustry (promyshlen-)	city (gorod)	store (magazin)	Enakievo	department (otdel)	complex (kompleks)	nutrition (pitan-)	company (predpriiat-)
Enakievskii Rabochii-08	taxes (nalog-)	payer (plate'l'shchik)	inspection (mi)	Ministry of Finance (mds)	tax (adj.) (nalogov-)	subject (sub'ekt)	subject (sub'ekt)	housekeeping (khoziaistvovan-)	patent (patent)	payout (uplat-)
Enakievskii Rabochii-10	fire (pozhar)	fire (adj.) (pozharn-)	safe (bezopasn-)	fire (ogn-)	Ministry of Emergency Sit. (MChS)	reason (prichin-)	man (muzhchin-)	handling (obrashchen-)	right (prav-)	house (dom)
Golos Respubliki-08	transportation (transport)	road (dorog-)	railway (adj.) (zheleznodorozhn-)	railway (adj.) (zhelezn-)	transport (adj.) (transportn-)	road (adj.) (dorozhn-)	car (adj.) (avtomobil'n-)	train (poezd)	movement (dvizhen-)	ministry (ministerstv-)
Kochegarka DNR-05	administration (administrats-)	appointment (pri-)	question (vopros)	citizen (grazhda-)	head (glav-)	city (adj.) (gorodsk-)	to consist of (sostoi-)	area (raion)	city (gorod)	Gorlovka (gorlovk-)
Novaia Niva-05	transport (adj.) (transportn-)	means (sredstv-)	driver (voditel-)	road (adj.) (dorozhn-)	road (dorog-)	city administration (ga-)	cargo (gruz-)	movement (dvizhen-)	dangerous (opasn-)	violation (narushen-)
Novaia Niva-07	area (raion)	administration (administrats-)	administration (administrats-)	head (glav-)	Telmanov'e (adj.) (tel'manov'sk-)	movement (dvizhen-)	house (dom)	area centre (raitsentr)	population (naselen-)	worker (rabotnik)
Novaia Zhizn'-04	maintenance (remont)	work (rabot-)	meter (metr-)	water (vod-)	reconstruction (vosstanovl-)	repair (adj.) (remontn-)	house (dom)	square (kvadratn-)	street (ulits-)	administration (administrats-)
Novaia Zhizn'-09	payout (oplat-)	services (uslug-)	bank (bank)	electric power (elektroenerg-)	rubel (rubl-)	company (kompan-)	branch (otdelen-)	postal (pochtov-)	payment (platezh-)	communications (sviaz-)
Novaia Zhizn'-13	fire (pozhar)	fire (adj.) (pozharn-)	fire (ogn-)	forest (les)	safe (bezopasn-)	Ministry of Emergency Sit. (MChS)	dangerous (opasn-)	reason (prichin-)	open (otkryt-)	tree (derev-)
Novye Gorizonty-06	communal (kommunal'n-)	question (vopros)	house (dom)	administration (administrats-)	street (ulits-)	city (gorod)	head (glav-)	gathering (skhod)	services (uslug-)	meeting (vstrech-)
Novyi Luch-03	payment (vyplat-)	pensions (pens-)	social (sotsial'n-)	aide (pomoshch-)	pension (pension-)	management (upravlen-)	copy (kop-)	inquiry (spravk-)	person (lits-)	document (dokument)
Novyi Luch-08	fire (pozhar)	fire (adj.) (pozharn-)	reason (prichin-)	fire (ogn-)	safe (bezopasn-)	appliance (pribor)	residential (zhil-)	house (dom)	supervision (nadzor)	right (prav-)
Novyi Luch-10	transport (adj.) (transportn-)	means (sredstv-)	road (adj.) (dorozhn-)	driver (voditel-)	movement (dvizhen-)	Interior Ministry (mvd)	cargo (gruz-)	city administration (ga-)	registration (registrats-)	right (prav-)
Rodina-01	meeting (vstrech-)	Aleksandr	Levchenko	administration (administrats-)	city (gorod)	question (vopros)	administration (administrats-)	worker (rabotnik)	September (sentiabr)	Khartsyzsk
Rodnoe Priazov'e-05	transport (adj.) (transportn-)	driver (voditel-)	road (adj.) (dorozhn-)	means (sredstv-)	movement (dvizhen-)	road (dorog-)	state vehicle inspection (gosavtoinspekts-)	right (prav-)	city administration (ga-)	violation (narushen-)
Rodnoe Priazov'e-06	Aleksei (aleks-)	societal (obshchestven-)	branch (otdelen-)	secretary (sekretar-)	movement (dvizhen-)	republic (respublik-)	Novoazovsk	Donetsk	area (raion)	conducted (provel-)
Rodnoe Priazov'e-09	area (raion)	Novoazovsk	administration (administrats-)	head (glav-)	work (rabot-)	department (otdel)	Morgun	Oleg	culture (kul'tur-)	year (god)
Snezhnianskie Novosti-02	administration (administrats-)	head (glav-)	city (gorod)	question (vopros)	Snezhnoe (snezhn-)	deputy (zamestitel-)	Darkovsk	meeting (soveshchan-)	settlement (poselkov-)	work (rabot-)
Snezhnianskie Novosti-11	branch (otdelen-)	company (predpriiat-)	labour (trud-)	fund (fond)	manufacturing (proizvodstv-)	accidental (neschastn-)	case (sluch-)	worker (rabotnik)	coal mine (shakht-)	social (sotsial'n-)
Snezhnianskie Novosti-14	occupied (zaniat-)	centre (tsentr)	work (rabot-)	Snezhniansk	city (adj.) (gorodsk-)	information (informats-)	temporarily (vremen-)	charakter (kharakter)	services (uslug-)	specialist (spetsialist)
Torezskii Gorniak-05	administration (administrats-)	city (gorod)	meeting (soveshchan-)	head (glav-)	question (vopros)	city (adj.) (gorodsk-)	work (rabot-)	improving publ. services (blagoustroistv-)	output (itog-)	population (naselen-)
Torezskii Gorniak-06	pensions (pens-)	payment (vyplat-)	inquiry (spravk-)	pensioner (pensioner)	person (lits-)	month (mesiats)	handling (obrashchen-)	pension (pension-)	management (upravlen-)	registration (registrats-)
Torezskii Gorniak-10	real estate (nedvizhim-)	justice (iustits-)	department (otdel)	property (imushchestv-)	state (adj.) (gosudarstvenn-)	chamber (palat-)	registration (adj.) (registratsion-)	ministry (ministerstv-)	technical (tekhnichesk-)	people's (narodn-)
Torezskii Gorniak-14	cargo (gruz-)	transport (adj.) (transportn-)	shipping (perevozk-)	dangerous (opasn-)	means (sredstv-)	heavy (tiazhelovesn-)	oversized (krupnogabaritn-)	driver (voditel-)	transportation (transport)	road (adj.) (dorozhn-)
Vash Ilovaisk-08	fire (pozhar)	fire (adj.) (pozharn-)	oven (pech-)	safe (bezopasn-)	appliance (pribor)	apartment (kvartir-)	children (det-)	right (prav-)	leave behind (ostavlia-)	fire (ogn-)
Vesnik DNR-07	object (ob'ekt)	heating (adj.) (otoplitel'n-)	house (dom)	season (sezon)	residential (zhil-)	construction (stroitel'stv-)	work (rabot-)	gas (gaz)	restore (vosstanovl-)	programme (program-)
Vestnik DNR-11	tariff (tarif-)	services (uslug-)	communal (kommunal'n-)	area (raion)	warm (tepl-)	increase (povyshen-)	electric power (elektroenerg-)	energetics (energetik-)	population (naselen-)	size (rost)
XpressKlub-06	city (gorod)	administration (administrats-)	resident (zhitel-)	aide (pomoshch-)	head (glav-)	street (ulits-)	city (adj.) (gorodsk-)	park (park)	territory (territori-)	event (meropriiat-)
XpressKlub-15	which (kotor-)	right (prav-)	document (dokument)	network (set-)	person (lits-)	pensions (pens-)	also (takzh-)	Donetsk News Agency (DAN)	payment (vyplat-)	case (sluch-)
XpressKlub-18	water (vod-)	supply (podtach-)	station (stants-)		graph (grafik)	day (sutk-)	replace (zamen-)	side (storon-)	situation (situats-)	state unitary enterprise (gup)
Znamia Pobedy-03	administration (administrats-)	city (gorod)	head (glav-)	Shvidkii (shvidk-)	question (vopros)	Aleksei (aleks-)	Shakhtersk	reconstruction (vosstanovlen-)	resident (zhitel-)	deputy (zamestitel-)
Znamia Pobedy-07	thousand (tys-)	million (mln)	tonne (ton-)	company (predpriiat-)	services (uslug-)	Hryvnia (grn)	electric power (elektroenerg-)	electric power (elektroenerg-)	Ozima Pshenitsa (ozim-)	coal (ugl-)

Table 13: Topics related to local administration

Pension payments were a contentious issue in the DNR and LNR. DNR and LNR residents retained their right to a pension from the Ukrainian state, as Ukraine considers them to be Ukrainian citizens. But in order to receive payments, pensioners had to register as being internally displaced, as well as report in person to the authorities at least once every two months[61]. This caused difficulties, particularly in the winter months, as queues at checkpoints could be hours long. Some elderly people did not survive the journey[62]. Pensions given out by the DNR and LNR authorities, meanwhile, were not very high due to lack of funding. Pensions were thus one of the rare topics over which criticism of the authorities was allowed:

> Residents of house number 100 on '8th Congress of Soviets' Street and other nearby high rises were given the opportunity to ask questions about issues that concern them. The primary and perhaps the most relevant topic of conversation was the problem of controlling pricing in the commercial facilities in the city and in the district. The townspeople noted that with the current level of pension payments and salaries, many of them cannot afford to buy not only meat products, but also sugar.[63]

Other reports were more factually oriented (without explicit or implicit criticism of the authorities) and related to topics such as the DNR and LNR authorities' approach to simplifying the tax code[64], the opening of new infrastructure projects[65], people dialling the emergency number for spurious reasons[66], and the risks of going ice fishing in winter[67]. Again, as above, identity discourse in such articles is mostly absent.

This is somewhat different, however, in articles that fall under the theme "local economy". Donbas has long been a region of heavy industry, particularly coal mining and metallurgy. As has been argued by Hiroaki Kuromiya[68], both the people and the

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[61] Halya Coynash, "Why Are Ukrainian Pensioners from Donbas Forced to Fight or Die for Their Pensions?," *Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group*, February 22, 2019, http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1550413831.
[62] UNHCR, "New Hope for Pensioners Struggling to Survive in Ukraine," *Www.unhcr.org*, September 11, 2018, https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2018/9/5b97bf004/new-hope-pensioners-struggling-survive-ukraine.html.
[63] Novyi Luch, "Tol'ko Vmeste My - Sila," *Novyi Luch*, August 5, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=422.
[64] Enakievskii Rabochii, "Nalogovaia Inspektsiia v G. Enakievo MDS DNR Informiruet," *Enakievskii Rabochii*, February 11, 2016, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=20839.
[65] Kochegarka DNR, "Nas Ne Dogoniat," *Kochegarka DNR*, September 14, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=3997.
[66] Rodnoe Priazov'e, "Za Lozhnyi Vyzov - Pridetsia Otvechat'," *Rodnoe Priazov'e*, August 5, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=445.
[67] Boevoe Znamia Donbassa, "MChS DNR Napominaet O Merakh Bezopasnosti Na Vodnykh Ob"ektakh v Zimnii Period!," *Boevoe Znamia Donbassa*, February 12, 2016, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=21582.
[68] Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870s-1990s.*; Kuromiya, "The Donbas - The Last Frontier of Europe?"

rulers of Donbas have considered mining and the values associated with these harsh and often difficult professions to be an integral part of Donbas identity. This idea was reiterated in newspaper articles with some regularity:

> Dear countrymen (zemliaki)! Esteemed residents of the Donetsk People's Republic! From my entire soul I congratulate you all on this holiday, which is close to every family in our glorious, hard-working Donbas: the Day of the Miner! For our region, being a miner is not just a profession, it is the backbone of the Donetsk People's Republic. The world-famous Donbas character was forged in the mineshafts (lavy) of Donbas by such heroic miners as Nikita Izotov, Ivan Brid'ko, Aleksandr Kol'chik and, of course, Aleksei Stakhanov. After being destroyed by the invaders during the Great Patriotic War, our native land quickly recovered, and in a short time, Donbas turned into a personification of industrial power […] All this was made possible largely thanks to the daily heroic work of the miners, who are famous for their courage, selfless devotion to their profession and unyielding character.[69]

Similar rhetoric is seen in articles about the celebration of the Day of the Metallurgists:

> Dear metallurgists! I congratulate you on your professional holiday - the Day of the Metallurgist of the DNR (den' metallurga DNR)! The Day of the Metallurgist is one of the most important holidays for the entire Republic. Metallurgy, along with the coal industry, has always been at the basis of the welfare of Donbas. Today, our local metallurgy, like other branches of heavy industry in our country, is going through hard times. There is a war going on, and the Donetsk People's Republic is under an economic and financial blockade. But even despite the extremely difficult conditions, you continue to work, produce steel, cast iron and rolled metal sheets, and maintain the equipment in working condition.[70]

But within this theme of local economy, the lifestyle that comes with being a region dominated by heavy industry was not only used in DNR and LNR newspapers to refer to the history of the region. There are many articles across the corpora that report on

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[69] Znamia Pobedy, "Pozdravlenie Glavy DNR Aleksandra Zakharchenko," *Znamia Pobedy*, August 31, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=2571.
[70] Rodina, "Za Vyslugu Let Dosttoinaia Pensiia," *Rodina*, July 15, 2016, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=3606.

miners' productivity[71], modernising the mines and equipment[72], and mining disasters[73]. Other topics relate to agriculture and irrigation[74], metallurgy (especially in Enakievo, home to a large metallurgy plant)[75], monetary policy[76], and the (fluctuating) price of supermarket products[77]. Identity discourse was thus not altogether absent in discussions about the local economy and politics, but it was by no means a focal point of newspaper coverage.

The themes above make up the majority of topics across all corpora, emphasising the degree to which DNR and LNR newspapers retained their function as chroniclers of local events[78]. But while this continuation of local newspapers' function as a provider of locally relevant information may seem obvious, it is not a given. Indeed, considering the amount of explicit and implicit control that the DNR and LNR authorities had over the content of the news that was produced, it would have been possible for newspapers to be mobilised for purposes of identity building. If this were the case, one would observe a significant amount of identity discourse and less of a continuation of the "normal". This narrative of "business as usual" shows that, while identity discourse was present in some articles (e.g. with regards to sports), it was otherwise either absent or lacking elaboration.

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[71] Kazachii Vestnik, "Verny Svoemu Gorodu," *Kazachii Vestnik*, February 15, 2017, http://kazache.ru/#newspaper/kazachiy-vestnik-117/.
[72] Znamia Pobedy, "'Shakhterskaia-Glubokaia'- Shakhta, Bez Kotoroi Gorodu Ne Zhit'," *Znamia Pobedy*, August 7, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=869.
[73] Kazachii Vestnik, "Poekhali!," *Kazachii Vestnik*, November 2, 2016, http://kazache.ru/#newspaper/kazachiy-vestnik-102/.
[74] Makeevskii Rabochii, "Vodoemy - v Arendu," *Makeevskii Rabochii*, August 29, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru/?p=2452.
[75] Enakievskii Rabochii, "Evgeniia Samokhina Provela Priem v Enakievo," *Enakievskii Rabochii*, August 8, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru/?p=1032.
[76] Makeevskii Rabochii, "Proshchanie S Meloch'iu," *Makeevskii Rabochii*, August 4, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru/?p=349.
[77] Rodnoe Priazov'e, "I Eto vse O Nikh. O Tsenakh," *Rodnoe Priazov'e*, August 31, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru/?p=2586.
[78] Hindman, "Community Newspapers, Community Structural Pluralism, and Local Conflict with Nonlocal Groups."

4.3.2 War and Memory

The second narrative is what I call war and memory. In DNR and LNR newspapers, the present-day Donbas war was a dominant theme discussed from both a contemporary and a historical perspective. First and foremost, there was a hearkening back to World War II and the role that Donbas played in it. Table 14 on the next page gives an overview of all topics that relate to war, conflict and violence.

Several topics show explicitly connect the Donbas conflict with World War II (topics Novaia Niva-09, Novyi Luch-11, Rodnoe Priazov'e-08, Vestnik DNR-04 and Znamia Pobedy-09). Terms like "Great Patriotic War" (velikaia otechestvennaia voina), "Soviet" (sovetskii), and "German" (nemetskii) occur together in these topics with terms like Donbas, "memory" (pamiat'), "land" (zemlia) and "our" (nash). When covering the Donbas conflict, writers would often compare the DNR's war against Ukraine with the Soviet Union's war against Nazi Germany, not only metaphorically but also geographically:

> The liberation of our region was preceded by almost 700 days of pain, fear and the mass extermination of [our] people. During the occupation of Donbas, 174.416 innocent civilians and 149.367 prisoners of war were killed and tortured, and the fate of 252 thousand residents of Donetsk was sealed after they were sent to Germany. On September 8 1943, thanks to the Red Army's courage and heroism, at the cost of many soldiers' lives, the residents of Donbas regained their freedom from the fascist enslavers! Celebrations in honour of the 72nd anniversary of the Day of Liberation of Donbas were held in all cities and districts of the DNR. They began on September 7 at the foot of the memorial complex at Saur-Mogila[79]. At this site, which is holy to every citizen of Donbas, a nationwide event was held, timed to take place on a memorable date. Over five thousand people visited the legendary hill, which last summer once again withstood the horrors of bombings and shelling.[80]

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[79] Savur-Mohyla (Rus : Saur-Mogila) is a strategic elevation near the town of Snizhne. It was the location of an intense battle between German and Soviet troops during World War II. In 1963, a monument was unveiled commemorating its liberation. In 2014 the site became the epicentre of heavy fighting between Ukrainian and DNR troops. After changing hands around 8 times, the hill was permanently occupied by DNR forces in August 2014. The monument, destroyed in the military back-and-forth, was rebuilt by the DNR authorities in 2016. See : RIA Novosti, "V DNR Vosstanavlivaiut memorial 'Saur-Mogila,'" *Www.ria.ru*, November 29, 2016, https://ria.ru/20161129/1482381463.html.

[80] Znamia Pobedy, "Pobezhdat' Fashizm - U Nas v Krovi!," *Znamia Pobedy*, September 14, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=3792.

Donetsk Vechernii-12	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8	Term 9	Term 10
Donetsk Vechernii-12	reconstruction (vosstanovlen-)	house (dom)	residential (zhil-)	shelling (obstrel-)	object (ob'ekt)	destruction (razrushen-)	area (raion)	damage (povrezhden-)	building (zdan-)	construction (stroitel'stv-)
Enakievskii Rabochii-01	this (et-)	year (god)	our (nash-)	which (kotor-)	one's (svo-)	people (liud-)	war (voin-)	city (gorod)	self (sam-)	life (zhizn-)
Golos Respubliki-04	house (dom)	reconstruction (vosstanovlen-)	construction (stroitel'stv-)	residential (zhil-)	object (ob'ekt)	urban engineering (ZhKKh)	construction (adj.) (stroitel'n-)	destruction (razrushen-)	work (rabot-)	programme (program-)
Kazachii Vestnik-06	shelling (obstrel-)	house (dom)	inured (postrada-)	Pervomaisk	village (poselk-)	residential (zhil-)	result (rezul'tat)	injury (ranen-)	area (raion)	damage (povrezhden-)
Kazachii Vestnik-10	youth (molodezh-)	city (gorod)	casualty (pogibsh-)	memory (pamia-)	our (nash-)	monument (pamiatnik)	Luhansk region (luganshchin-)	peace (mir)	organisation (organizats-)	young (molod-)
Novaia Niva-09	war (voin-)	great (velik-)	patriotic (otechestven-)	our (nash-)	year (god)	victory (pobed-)	veteran (veteran)	land (zeml-)	memory (pamia-)	Donbas
Novorossiia-02	ополчен	Sloviansk	DNR	Donetsk	city (gorod)	soldier (voen-)	insurgent (opolchents-)	opponent (protivnik)	army (arm-)	order (prikaz)
Novorossiia-07	сир	Syrian (siriisk-)	Turkey (turts-)	ally (soiuznik)	opponent (protivnik)	success (uspekh-)	USA (SShA)	Russia (ross-)	war (voin-)	soldier (voen-)
Novye Gorizonty-01	class (klass-)	children (det-)	one's (svo-)	war (voin-)	peace (mir)	day (den-)	this (et-)	life (zhizn-)	which (kotor-)	people (liud-)
Novyi Luch-07	soldier (voen-)	service (sluzhb-)	commisariat (kommisariat)	defence (oboron-)	content (soderzhan-)	money (adj.) (denezhn-)	payment (vyplat-)	absence (otstutstv-)	demand (trebovan-)	age (vozrast)
Novyi Luch-11	war (voin-)	liberation (osvobozhden-)	year (god)	great (velik-)	Donbas	our (nash-)	patriotic (otechestven-)	German (nemetsk-)	Soviet (adj.) (sovetsk-)	veteran (veteran)
Rodnoe Priazov'e-08	victory (pobed-)	war (voin-)	great (velik-)	our (nash-)	patriotic (otechestven-)	memory (pamiat-)	demonstration (akts-)	city (gorod)	history (istor-)	land (zeml-)
Snezhnianskie Novosti-08	war (voin-)	year (god)	our (nash-)	city (gorod)	Donbas	battle (bo-)	casualty (pogibsh-)	great (velik-)	veteran (veteran)	memory (pamia-)
Vestnik DNR-04	year (god)	war (voin-)	Soviet (adj.) (sovetsk-)	great (velik-)	patriotic (otechestven-)	patriotic (otechestven-)	our (nash-)	battle (bo-)	one's (svo-)	city (gorod)
XpressKlub-14	Ukrainian army (vsu)	area (raion)	militia (milits-)	people's (narodn-)	soldier (voen-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	security officer (silovik)	soldier (voen-)	point (punkt)	soldier (voennosluzha-)
XXI Vek-03	grenade launcher (granatomet)	Stankov	Anti-tank (adj.) (protivotankov-)	to shoot (obstrelia-)	confirm (podtvergl-)	previous (minuvsh-)	day (sutk-)	lead (vel-)	Strelkov	fire (ogon-)
XXI Vek-04	Marochko	Ukrainian army (vsu)	soldier (voennosluzha-)	подполковник	militia (milits-)	representative (predstavitel-)	point (punkt)	brigade (brigad-)	armed (vooruzhen-)	population (naselen-)
Znamia Pobedy-09	war (voin-)	Donbas	great (velik-)	memory (pamia-)	demonstration (miting)	memory (pamia-)	Soviet (adj.) (sovetsk-)	soldier (soldat-)	soldier (voen-)	victory (pobed-)

Table 14: Topics related to war

Another example is the commemoration of World War II through the march of the so-called "immortal regiment" (bessmertnyi polk). This tradition, which originated in the Siberian city of Tomsk in 2012, has gained popularity in Russia and some other places (including the DNR and LNR) as a celebration of World War II veterans[81]. In Makeevka, for example, the head of the local city administration, Iurii Pokintelitsa, said the following during an event commemorating World War II:

> The work to perpetuate the memory of the Great Patriotic War in our city continues. The citizens of Makeevka (makeevchane) remember their heroes. […] On the eve of the 72nd anniversary of the liberation from the Nazi invaders, this holiday now takes on special meaning for us. Our guys are once again rising up to the defence of their native land! Dear veterans, thank you for the feat that you showed in your youth, and for the example you have set for the current generation. We will try not to let you down![82]

This position of World War II as an object of commemoration did not always exist, as can be seen in the dynamic topic model built from the *Makeevskii Rabochii* corpus. Table 15 below shows how the topic "war" has evolved over time in *Makeevskii Rabochii*. The "overall" column shows the 10 most relevant terms across all three time stamps. The other three columns display the topic per time period, which range from February 2013 until November 2016.

Rank	Overall	Feb-Nov 2013	Dec 2013 - Feb 2015	Mar 2015 - Nov 2016
1	war (voin-)	war (voin-)	war (voin-)	war (voin-)
2	great (velik-)	people's (narodn-)	great (velik-)	year (god)
3	year (god)	MP (deputat)	patriotic (otechestven-)	great (velik-)
4	patriotic (otechestven-)	victory (pobed-)	victory (pobed-)	patriotic (otechestven-)
5	victory (pobed-)	Valerii (valer-)	summer (let-)	victory (pobed-)
6	summer (let-)	Donbas	year (god)	day (den-)
7	memory (pamiat-)	miner's (shakhtersk-)	memory (pamiat-)	summer (let-)
8	day (den-)	Omel'chenko	life (zhizn-)	veteran (veteran)
9	Donbas	Berlin (berlin)	holy (sviat-)	casualty (pogibsh-)
10	war (adj.) (boev-)	motor rally (avtoprobeg)	our (nash-)	war (adj.) (boev-)

Table 15: Dynamic topic related to war and memory. Table displays Makeevskii Rabochii dynamic topic 11.

[81] Novaia Niva, "'Bessmertnyi Polk,'" *Novaia Niva*, April 28, 2016, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=29186.
[82] Makeevskii Rabochii, "Snova Derzhim Udar," *Makeevskii Rabochii*, September 10, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=3475.

In the period before the conflict, between February and November 2013, the topic model picks up on an association between the words "war" (voina), "victory" (pobeda) and Valerii Omel'chenko, who was an MP for Makeevka in the Verkhovna Rada. After the Euromaidan revolution, Omel'chenko left the Party of Regions to stand as an independent candidate. He was re-elected in 2014[83]. Before Euromaidan, Omel'chenko was an enthusiastic participant in local celebrations of the end of World War II, for example by organising a car rally from Makeevka to Berlin in honour of the 70-year anniversary of the liberation of Donbas in 2013[84]. As the conflict progressed, the "Great Patriotic War" became a more salient topic of discussion, and previously absent associations between the war and terms like "holy" (sviatoi), "memory" (pamiat') and "our" (nash) become relevant. Under the DNR, *Makeevskii Rabochii* writers drew parallels between the sacrifices made by World War II veterans from Donbas and the modern-day conflict. In so doing, the memory of World War II was kept alive as a way to continuously remind readers of the importance of emerging victorious from the Donbas conflict:

Now, more than ever, we understand what the veterans talked about every year on May 9 [Victory Day]. On average, each of them is 70 years old. […] The monuments, obelisks and stelae for the Great Patriotic War are faithful keepers of memory. Their silent presence in our life serves one very important goal: do not forget the achievements of your grandfathers and fathers! And do not betray [them]![85]

It is important to note that while the memory of World War II was alive and well in DNR and LNR newspapers, the memory of the Soviet Union was not. Patriotism, if discussed at all, was framed within the context of the war[86]:

On September 8, Library No. 2 organised a patriotic hour dedicated to the liberation of Donbas, entitled 'No one shall be forgotten'. During the event, high

[83] Donetskaia Pravda, "Storonniki Diktatorskikh Zakonov Snova Idut v Radu: Valerii Omel'chenko," *Www.pravda.dn.ua*, October 24, 2014, http://pravda.dn.ua/investigation/81-storonnyky-dyktatorskykh-zakonov-snova-ydut-v-radu-valeryy-omelchenko.; Chesno, "Omel'chenko Valerii Pavlovich: Biohrafiia," www.chesno.org, 2015, https://www.chesno.org/politician/288/.
[84] Makeevskii Rabochii, "Za Kruglym Stolom O Kvadratnykh Problemakh," *Makeevskii Rabochii*, March 4, 2013, http://makrab.news/?m_ob=NUM&m_id=18309.
[85] Makeevskii Rabochii, "Tsentr Upravleniia Vosstanovleniem. Vse Nuzhnoe - Detiam," *Makeevskii Rabochii*, April 24, 2015, http://makrab.news/?m_ob=NUM&m_id=18538.
[86] Novyi Luch, "Pamiat', Kotoraia Tak Nuzhna!," *Novyi Luch*, August 4, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=415; Makeevskii Rabochii, "Kraski Tsveta Khaki," *Makeevskii Rabochii*, February 26, 2016, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=23312.

school students became acquainted with some heroic pages in our region's history. The kids listened to the librarian's story about the occupation and liberation of Donbas, took part in a quiz, and listened with great interest to a story by Ol'ga Gladneva, author of the book *War Through the Eyes of Children* (voina glazami detei) and *Children of the Soldiers of Victory* (deti soldat pobedy), about childhood in wartime.[87]

Holiday celebrations in the DNR and LNR also put a heavy emphasis on World War II:

> The hall rose with great applause when V.N. Khlapov, liberator of Donbas, front-line soldier, and participant in the Great Patriotic War, walked onto the stage, as a symbol of the continuous defence of the Motherland. A concert was held on a high note of patriotism and sincere respect for the heroes of our native land, who defended their homeland at the cost of their own blood and life. For this sacrifice we express our enormous gratitude to all the groups that performed […].[88]

Both the DNR and the LNR instated numerous annual holidays[89]. Many of these were copies of Russian or former Soviet holidays, including Victory Day (May 9) and the Day of the Russian Language (an official UN holiday celebrated on June 6 in the DNR, but not in the LNR). Other official holidays were the Day of the Miner, various Christian holidays, and celebrations dedicated to professions such as the Day of the Journalist and the Day of the Builder.

A closer look at articles about holiday celebrations reveals a similar pattern to what is observed in coverage about the conflict, a consistent connection between the Donbas conflict and World War II:

> Today, people gathered in the morning on Lenin Square to congratulate their defenders on the Holiday of Airforce Troops (prazdnik vosdushno-desantnykh

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[87] Rodina, "Pamiatnaia Data," *Rodina*, September 21, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=4417.

[88] Nashe Vremia, "'Geroi Zhivut Sredi Nas,'" *Nashe Vremia*, December 15, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=14657.

[89] DNR-Online, "Prazdnichnye Dni I Professional'nye Prazdniki Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki," www.dnr-online.ru, 2019, https://dnr-online.ru/prazdnichnye-dni-i-professionalnye-prazdniki-donetskoj-narodnoj-respubliki/.; Dikoe Pole, "Prazdniki LNR," www.dikoe-pole.info, 2019, http://www.dikoe-pole.info/gosudarstvennye-i-professionalnye-prazdniki-lnr/.

voisk)[90]. There were many young people and children of all ages among those present, despite the fact that since the morning the echoes of heavy artillery shells were heard in the city.[91]

And, in an article published on September 3, the "Day of the Liberation of Donbas":

> Dear veterans of the Great Patriotic War, residents of the city! I sincerely congratulate you on the Day of Liberation of Donbass from the Nazi invaders! Decades are passing, generations are changing, but this holiday was, is and remains a symbol of the great unity of the people in the name of one goal: victory over the enemy. And today, when our city, even the whole of Donbas, is going through such difficult times, we do not only remember [them] - we honour and celebrate this day, which, due to the present circumstances, acquired special meaning and special significance for us.[92]

The military feats and sacrifices were thus celebrated as Donbas achievements, as opposed to Soviet ones: while the heroism of the people of Donbas received ample attention, there was barely a mention of the (geo)political context that World War II was embedded in. Soviet nostalgia, which has been on the rise in Russia[93] and has played a significant role in Russian media[94], advertisement[95] and in online communities[96], was largely absent on the pages of DNR and LNR newspapers. These outlets did not evoke memory of relative economic, political and especially physical security from the Soviet past, nor did they hearken back to the glory days of heavy industry (cf. the pre-war era, when Donbas was responsible for more than 50% of the total Soviet coal production[97]). What was continuously highlighted instead is the military victory over Nazi Germany.

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[90] The Day of the Airforce Troops has been celebrated annually on August 2 in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and some other territories, in some places since the 1930s.

[91] Boevoe Znamia Donbassa, "Gorlovka Otmechaet Den' VDV," *Boevoe Znamia Donbassa*, August 6, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=678.

[92] Makeevskii Rabochii, "S Dnem Osvobozhdeniia Donbassa!," *Makeevskii Rabochii*, September 3, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=2836.

[93] Levada Tsentr, "Nostal'gia Po SSSR," www.levada.ru, 2018, https://www.levada.ru/2018/12/19/nostalgiya-po-sssr-2/?fromtg=1.

[94] Olena Nikolayenko, "Contextual Effects on Historical Memory: Soviet Nostalgia among Post-Soviet Adolescents," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 41 (2008): 243–59, https://faculty.fordham.edu/onikolayenko/Nikolayenko ComPostCom2008.pdf.

[95] Jeremy Morris, "The Empire Strikes Back: Projections of National Identity in Contemporary Russian Advertising," *The Russian Review* 64, no. 4 (2005): 642–60, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3664229.

[96] Ekaterina Kalinina and Manuel Menke, "Negotiating the Past in Hyperconnected Memory Cultures: Post-Soviet Nostalgia and National Identity in Russian Online Communities," *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics* 12, no. 1 (2016): 59–74.

[97] S L., "Soviet Coal Production since the War," *The World Today* 7, no. 12 (1951): 518–28, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40392380.; O Danilin, "On the Way to Decline: The Development of the Donbass Coal-Mining Industry from the 1950s to the 1980s," *Mining Technology* 111, no. 3 (2002): 167–71, https://doi.org/10.1179/mnt.2002.111.3.167.

4.3.3 Loss and guilt

The third and most important narrative present in this chapter's corpus is that of loss and guilt. DNR and LNR newspapers framed the prior relationship between the people of Donbas and post-Soviet Ukraine as uncomfortable but nonetheless peaceful, an arrangement between reluctant but willing participants. According to this framing, this peaceful relationship was brutally disrupted by Ukrainian "extremists" after the events of the Euromaidan revolution, leading to an armed conflict and excessive violence on the part of Ukraine. Articles circulating this narrative were key drivers of identity discourse in Donbas, and they mostly focused on the Ukrainian military and post-Maidan government, with relatively less emphasis on Ukrainian society as a whole. The key frame that was repeated here is that of guilt: Ukraine and Ukrainians are "guilty"[98] of betraying Donbas by allowing themselves to be usurped by radical elements, leaving Donbas no choice but to leave Ukraine. Below, I will discuss this narrative in two parts: 1) ingroup identity; and 2) outgroup identity.

4.3.3.1 Ingroup identity

Table 16 below shows the topics in the corpus to do with the construction of in- and outgroups[99]. Topics in the table contain terms related to spatial groups of membership (e.g. locations such as "Russia", "Donbas", "Republic"; see also chapter 3), identity attributes such as language and language politics, practices such as holidays and other "national" events, and identity markers referring to ingroups and outgroups (e.g. "we" and "our" versus "they" and "their"[100]).

I will first explore the use of the term "our" (nash) as a marker of ingroup-focused language use[101]. The first point of note to take away from table 16 is the common co-occurrence of the term "nash" and "respublika" (republic), for example in topics Donetsk Vechernii-01, Golos Respubliki-10, Kochegarka DNR-06, Vestnik DNR-02 and XpressKlub-17. The term "our republic" (nasha respublika) was used consistently

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[98] Maiia Klimova, "Ukraina - Sakral'naia Zhertva," *Makeevskii Rabochii*, September 19, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=4227%0A.
[99] Henri Tajfel, "Cognitive Aspects of Prejudice," *Journal of Social Issues* 25, no. 4 (1969): 79–97, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1969.tb00620.x.; Tajfel, "Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations."; Ellemers and Haslam, "Social Identity Theory."
[100] See: Jette G Hansen and Jun Liu, "Social Identity and Language: Theoretical and Methodological Issues," *TESOL Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1997): 567–76, https://doi.org/10.2307/3587839.
[101] De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak, "The Discursive Construction of National Identities."; Tarnavskii and Filatova, "Analiz Publichnogo Diskursa v Rossiiskikh Sotsial'nykh Setiakh Vokrug Konflikta v Donbasse."

and repeatedly in a variety of contexts by both article writers and in quotations, particularly in "official" DNR newspapers. A state official was quoted as follows:

> Dear friends! The year 2015 is coming to a close. This year has been in many ways historical and symbolic for all of us. The Donetsk People's Republic has made its first steps on the difficult path towards stabilisation and development. All of us have put in maximum effort in order to turn our Republic into an independent, self-sustaining and flourishing state.[102]

Second, table 16 shows a connection between the terms "our" and "city" (gorod), along with the names of various cities such as Ilovaisk, Alchevsk and Pereval'sk, for example in topics Kochegarka DNR-06, Torezskii Gorniak-01, and Vash Ilovaisk-01 in table 16. In every "official" DNR newspaper, "nash gorod" and "nash raion" (our city and our region, respectively), were the default way of referring to a place, for example in sentences such as "our readers know that our city is trying to establish business ties with the Russian Federation"[103].

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[102] Snezhnianskie Novosti, "Dorogie Druz'ia! Pozdravlenie Ot Aleksandra Zakharchenko Glavy Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki," *Snezhnianskie Novosti*, December 30, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=16656.
[103] Xpress-Klub, "Zabotiatsia O Budushchem," *Xpress-Klub*, August 16, 2016, http://xpressclub.ru/news/page/264.; Znamia Pobedy, "Ne Prostim, Ne Zabudem," *Znamia Pobedy*, August 3, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru/?p=278; Kochegarka DNR, "Priezd v Gorlovku Missii OBSE," *Kochegarka DNR*, November 21, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=11186.

Newspaper & topic no.	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8	Term 9	Term 10
Donetsk Vecherkii-01	this (et-)	our (nash-)	republic (respublik-)	Donetsk	year (god)	DNR	one's (svo-)	war (voin-)	people (liud-)	city (gorod)
Donetsk Vecherkii-03	area (raion)	utilities (kommunal'shchik)	commission (komiss-)	communal (kommunal'n-)	work (rabot-)	contest (konkurs)	street (ulits-)	house (dom)	contest (adj.) (konkursn-)	maintenance (remont)
Enakievskii Rabochii-01	this (et-)	year (god)	our (nash-)	which (kotor-)	one's (svo-)	people (liud-)	war (voin-)	city (gorod)	self (sam-)	life (zhizn-)
Enakievskii Rabochii-03	trade (torgovl-)	administration (administrats-)	agricultural industry (agpromyshlen-)	city (gorod)	store (magazin)	Enakievo	department (otdel)	complex (kompleks)	nutrition (pitan-)	company (predpriiat-)
Enakievskii Rabochii-04	republic (respublik-)	DNR	ministry (ministerstv-)	pensions (pens-)	Donetsk	people's (narodn-)	work (rabot-)	pension (pension-)	management (upravlen-)	fund (fond)
Enakievskii Rabochii-07	city (gorod)	culture (kul'tur-)	republic (respublik-)	administration (administrats-)	Enakievo (adj.) (enakievsk-)	Donetsk	Enakievo	young (molod-)	department (otdel)	holiday (prazdnik)
Golos Respubliki-01	DNR	republic (respublik-)	ministry (ministerstv-)	year (god)	work (rabot-)	social (sotsial'n-)	Donetsk	question (vopros)	service (sluzhb-)	aide (pomoshch-)
Golos Respubliki-10	our (nash-)	republic (respublik-)	Donetsk	this (et-)	which (kotor-)	people's (narodn-)	DNR	one's (svo-)	event (meropriiat-)	holiday (prazdnik)
Kazachii Vestnik-02	LNR	republic (respublik-)	Luhansk	people's (narodn-)	minister (ministr)	council (sovet)	people's (narodn-)	head (glav-)	Plotnitskii (plotnitsk-)	Igor
Kochegarka DNR-01	this (et-)	our (nash-)	Ukraine (ukrain-)	which (kotor-)	year (god)	one's (svo-)	people (liud-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	city (gorod)	new (nov-)
Kochegarka DNR-06	city (gorod)	our (nash-)	republic (respublik-)	administration (administrats-)	event (meropriiat-)	holiday (prazdnik)	head (glav-)	guest (gost-)	concert (kontsert)	peace (mir)
Novaia Niva-02	DNR	state (adj.) (gosudarstvenn-)	republic (respublik-)	people's (narodn-)	person (lits-)	person (lits-)	right (prav-)	registration (registrats-)	year (god)	taxes (nalog-)
Novaia Niva-13	your (pl.) (vash-)	well-being (blagopoluch-)	health (zdorov-)	holiday (prazdnik)	let's (pust-)	wish (zhela-)	labour (trud-)	happiness (schast-)	peace (mir)	strong (krepk-)
Novaia Niva-14	republic (respublik-)	societal (obshchestven-)	branch (otdelen-)	Donetsk	movement (dvizhen-)	receiver (priemn-)	question (vopros)	people's (narodn-)	secretary (sekretar-)	magnificent (velikodn-)
Novaia Zhizn'-01	this (et-)	one's (svo-)	our (nash-)	year (god)	which (kotor-)	life (zhizn-)	village (sel-)	house (dom)	family (sem-)	people (liud-)
Novaia Zhizn'-06	area (raion)	societal (obshchestven-)	republic (respublik-)	holiday (prazdnik)	head (glav-)	movement (dvizhen-)	administration (administrats-)	Donetsk	Starobeshevsk	branch (otdelen-)
Novorossiia-01	our (nash-)	which (kotor-)	Ukraine (ukrain-)	Russia (ross-)	people (liud-)	self (sam-)	so (tak)	Donbas	year (god)	war (voin-)
Novorossiia-04	Donetsk	oblast	republic (respublik-)	governate (gubern-)	Krivoi-Rog (adj.) (krivorozhsk-)	Luhansk	Donbas	committee (komitet)	region (region)	council (sovet)
Novorossiia-05	Novorossiia (novoross-)	Russian (russk-)	people (narod)	movement (dvizhen-)	just (spravedliv-)	create (sozdan-)	humanitarian (gumanitarn-)	aide (pomoshch-)	type (tip-)	state (gosudarstv-)
Novye Gorizonty-02	republic (respublik-)	city (gorod)	administration (administrats-)	societal (obshchestven-)	Kirov (adj.)	branch (otdelen-)	young (molod-)	head (glav-)	administration (administrats-)	Zhdanovka (zhdanovk-)
Novye Gorizonty-05	aide (pomoshch-)	humanitarian (gumanitarn-)	family (sem-)	social (sotsial'n-)	population (naselen-)	human (chel-)	charity (blagotvoritel'n-)	reception (poluchen-)	invalid (invalid-)	objective (tselev-)
Novyi Luch-01	area (raion)	Amvrosievka (adj.) (amvrosievsk-)	administration (administrats-)	head (glav-)	branch (otdelen-)	work (rabot-)	republic (respublik-)	societal (obshchestven-)	Tarasenko	leader (rukovoditel-)
Novyi Luch-12	holiday (prazdnik)	village (sel-)	agricultural (sel'sk-)	holiday (adj.) (prazdnichn-)	resident (zhitel-)	song (pesn-)	guest (gost-)	village (poselok-)	evening (vecher)	programme (program-)
Rodina-09	contest (konkurs)	holiday (prazdnik)	festival (festival-)	studio (stud-)	participant (uchastnik)	creative (tvorchesk-)	participation (uchast-)	victor (pobeditel-)	collective (kollektiv)	event (meropriiat-)
Rodina-11	Khartsyzsk	work (rabot-)	city (gorod)	company (predpriiat-)	water (vod-)	maintenance (remont)	Zugres	resident (zhitel-)	Ilovaisk	question (vopros)
Rodnoe Priazov'e-03	DNR	Donetsk	republic (respublik-)	people's (narodn-)	justice (iustits-)	person (lits-)	state (adj.) (gosudarstvenn-)	property (imushchestv-)	handling (obrashchen-)	citizen (grazhda-)
Rodnoe Priazov'e-09	area (raion)	Novoazovsk	administration (administrats-)	head (glav-)	work (rabot-)	department (otdel)	Morgun	Oleg	culture (kul'tur-)	year (god)
Rodnoe Priazov'e-12	holiday (prazdnik)	autumn (osen-)	holiday (adj.) (prazdnichn-)	guest (gost-)	song (pesn-)	day (den-)	concert (kontsert)	cheerful (vesel-)	programme (program-)	every (kazhd-)
Snezhnianskie Novosti-07	republic (respublik-)	DNR	state (adj.) (gosudarstvenn-)	people's (narodn-)	Donetsk	ministry (ministerstv-)	document (dokument)	registration (registrats-)	right (prav-)	person (lits-)
Snezhnianskie Novosti-09	your (pl.) (vash-)	well-being (blagopoluch-)	well-being (blagopoluch-)	our (nash-)	health (zdorov-)	wish (zhela-)	congratulate (pozdravlia-)	let's (pust-)	happiness (schast-)	day (den-)
Torezskii Gorniak-01	republic (respublik-)	city (gorod)	our (nash-)	Donetsk	which (kotor-)	this (et-)	DNR	resident (zhitel-)	house (dom)	day (den-)
Vash Ilovaisk-01	our (nash-)	city (gorod)	Ilovaisk	this (et-)	one's (svo-)	which (kotor-)	year (god)	holiday (prazdnik)	children (det-)	day (den-)
Vash Ilovaisk-07	republic (respublik-)	people's (narodn-)	Donetsk	DNR	DNR	republican (respublikansk-)	Zakharchenko (zakharchenk-)	budget (biudzhet)	Aleksandr	year (god)
Vestnik DNR-02	republic (respublik-)	DNR	administration (administrats-)	people's (narodn-)	ministry (ministerstv-)	which (kotor-)	ministry (ministerstv-)	company (predpriiat-)	work (rabot-)	council (sovet)
Xpressklub-02	LNR	republic (respublik-)	head (glav-)	minister (ministr)	announce (soobshch-)	people's (narodn-)	council (sovet)	council (sovet)	chairperson (predsedatel-)	ministry (ministerstv-)
Xpressklub-07	Alchevsk	Perevalsk	city (adj.) (gorodsk-)	Luch (luch)	Alchevsk (adj.)	place (mest-)	red (krasn-)	centre (tsentr)	Stakhanov	native (rodn-)
Xpressklub-09	Luhansk	people's (narodn-)	holy (sviat-)	temple (khram)	address (adres)	centre (tsentr)	academy (adj.) (akademichesk-)	theatre (teatr)	administration (administrats-)	announce (soobshch-)
Xpressklub-16	Russia (ross-)	Russian (rossiisk-)	Crimea (krym)	Putin	Moscow (moskv-)	Russian (russk-)	Vladimir	country (stran-)	president (prezident)	announce (zaiav-)
Xpressklub-17	our (nash-)	us (nam)	say (skaza-)	future (budushch-)	republic (respublik-)	land (zeml-)	people (liud-)	today (segodn-)	thanks (spasib-)	war (voin-)
XXI Vek-01	Luhansk	which (kotor-)	this (et-)	republic (respublik-)	LNR	year (god)	our (nash-)	Ukraine (ukrain-)	head (glav-)	one's (svo-)
Znamia Pobedy-10	republic (respublik-)	Donetsk	people's (narodn-)	movement (dvizhen-)	DNR	societal (obshchestven-)	organisation (organizats-)	Zakharchenko (zakharchenk-)	Aleksandr	branch (otdelen-)
Znamia Pobedy-12	holiday (prazdnik)	song (pesn-)	cheerful (vesel-)	village (poselok-)	musical (adj.) (muzikal'n-)	new year's (adj.) (novogodn-)	guest (gost-)	audience (zritel-)	children (rebiat-)	gift (podark-)
Znamia Pobedy-15	language (iazyk)	Russian (russk-)	state (adj.) (gosudarstvenn-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	country (stran-)	week (nedel-)	peace (mir)	read (chita-)	demonstration (akts-)	native (rodn-)

Table 16: Topics related to ingroup and outgroup identity

The second trope deserving of further scrutiny is Russia, or Russian-ness (see topics Kazachii Vestnik-09, Novorossiia-05, XpressKlub-16 and Znamia Pobedy-15 in table 16). "Novorossiia", is a term used historically to denote a region and later a province in the Russian Empire north of the Black Sea (see chapter 1). The *Novorossiia* publication regularly employed the term "Novorossiia" to refer to the DNR and LNR. "Novorossiia" was often used as a frame of reference, equated to a vision of a "homeland" (Rodina). The following editorial from 2016 by a Donetsk-based author, which addresses former DNR and LNR combatants who left the conflict zone, brings many of these concepts together:

> Guys (rebiata), if you really are patriots of your homeland (Rodina) and sincerely stand up for it, why do you keep writing your senseless blogs, sometimes frankly deceitful, and discredit the honour of your favorite cities, somewhere out there in a safe place, away from everything that's happening? Yes, you once took part in the Russian Spring (Russkaia Vesna), paid for it with your freedom, some with your health. But that was 2 years ago! Today, what are you really doing to help your homeland that is occupied by fascists? Why do you not join the ranks of the army of Novorossiia? Or come help us out here, behind the frontline, like the rest of the guys that we managed to free by exchanging prisoners of war? Why did you run away from Donbas after the prisoner exchange and, after recovering your health, did not return here? And, like the notorious thirty children of Lieutenant Schmidt[104], you are engaged in self-promotion and shamefully extorting money from kind and trustful people! The war is not yet over. Our cities are under fascist occupation. Come to Donbas, help us whichever way you can, united in a single structure. After all, only in this case you will have the opportunity to really help your cities. The front, both military and political, is here.[105]

The armed forces of the DNR and LNR were not officially called the "army of Novorossiia". Importantly, *Novorossiia*, which was run by Pavel Gubarev (see chapter

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[104] The "Children of Lieutenant Schmidt" (deti leitenanta Shmidta) is a Russian expression referring to a fraudulent enterprise or a person who swindles others out of money. The eponymous children are a set of characters from the novel *The Little Golden Calf* (*Zolotoi Telenok*) by Il'ia Il'f and Ievgenii Petrov, originally published in 1931. This group of swindlers poses as children of the famous Lieutenant Piotr Petrovich Schmidt, one of the leaders of the Sevastopol' uprising during the Russian Revolution of 1905, to try to trick Soviet officials and other people into giving them money. See: Il'ia Il'f and Ievgenii Petrov, *Zolotoi Telenok* (Moscow: Tekst, 2016).
[105] Novorossia, "Tridtsat' Synovei Leitenanta Shmidta," *Novorossia*, December 11, 2016, http://novopressa.ru/articles-450.html.

1), is the only newspaper in the corpus that regularly used the term "Novorossiia" to refer to local collective identity. In other papers, the term served no such purpose. It was instead used to describe, for example, a new strain of grape that was named Novorossiia[106], or to refer to the newspaper[107] or the television channel *Novorossiia TV*[108]; thus, with one exception, the term carried no significance with regards to identity building in the DNR and LNR. The trope was common enough to be mentioned from time to time in a variety of contexts, but the term "Novorossiia" was decisively not at the core of DNR/LNR identity discourse.

The concept of the so-called "Russian World" was also commonly used in *Novorossiia* as a way to link the DNR and LNR to the Russian political and especially cultural space:

> At the heart of all the processes taking place in Novorossiia that have developed in this space over the past two decades, both before and after Maidan, lies the Russian Idea. To be Russian is the main motivation. To defend one's right to belong to the Russian World, to speak in Russian, to love and propagate Russian culture, to practice the Russian Orthodox faith, to enjoy the Russian nature, land and space, to communicate with the people around you. These are such simple, truly human desires, but how expensive they are to entertain.[109]

As with "Novorossiia", however, the concept of "Russian World" carried little to no significance in other newspapers when it comes to identity building, but instead was mostly used in rather mundane ways. In the LNR, for example, "Russkii Mir" was the name of a school programme designed to promote literacy[110]. The term was also used in a non-metaphorical sense within the context of the ongoing integration of the LNR with the Russian economic space[111]. "Russkii Mir" is also the name of a Russian organisation that aims to popularise Russian culture and language in various parts of the world, including the DNR and LNR[112]. The notion of the "Russian World" as a cultural or historical referent is almost entirely absent. This is notable considering that

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[106] Enakievskii Rabochii, "S Miru Po Nitke," *Enakievskii Rabochii*, August 8, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=1051.

[107] Novaia Zhizn', "Tirazh Raionki Rastet," *Novaia Zhizn'*, August 6, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=560.

[108] Rodina, "Novosti," *Rodina*, December 21, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=15422.

[109] Novorossia, "Za Chto Srazhaetsia Novorossiia," *Novorossia*, August 27, 2016, http://novopressa.ru/articles/za-chto-srazhaetsya-novorossiya.html.

[110] Xpress-Klub, "Veteran Prinimal Pozdravleniia," *Xpress-Klub*, May 12, 2016, http://xpressclub.ru/news/page/273.

[111] Xpress-Klub, "Pis'mo v nomer 'VSE DLIA FRONTA! VSE,'" *Xpress-Klub*, March 28, 2017, http://xpressclub.ru/news/page/220.

[112] Novaia Niva, "Slovo - Za Nami!," *Novaia Niva*, June 23, 2016, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=33847.

the trope is highly prevalent in rhetoric espoused by Russian President Vladimir Putin and other important political figures inside and outside of the Russian Federation[113].

Language politics in the DNR and LNR were a contentious issue. The alleged repression of the use of Russian by the Ukrainian state has long been a grievance in Donbas[114]. In DNR and LNR newspapers, this idea was given ample attention, for example in an article by Aleksandr Zakharchenko decrying a decision by then-president of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko to remove the Russian language from Ukrainian passports:

> I cannot comment on the decision of the Ukrainian authorities, that is, the decision of the President of Ukraine, who signed this decree. I would like to comment on the attitude of Russians in Ukraine and even Ukrainians themselves with regards to this decree and to this policy. Let us remember why Donbas rose up (podnialsia) a year ago. The main reason for the protests was the banning of the Russian language.[115]

One article in *Znamia Pobedy,* which devoted particular attention to this issue (see table 16 at the bottom), assigned almost mythical qualities to the Russian language:

> Residents of Shakhtersk are actively supporting the initiative of holding the Russian Language Week in the [LNR]. For the overwhelming majority of the residents of Donbass, the Russian language has been native since ancient times, and still is to this day. It is one of the richest and most developed languages in the world. It is unusually suitable for high eloquence, sonorous poetry, for gentle simplicity, but also for words that speak to the heart. It is deserving of study in and of itself as one of the [world's] most powerful and most lively languages, as well as for the sake of the literature it has produced. [In Russian] one can easily express abstract thoughts, one's inner lyrical feelings,

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[113] O'Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov, "Who Identifies with the 'Russian World'? Geopolitical Attitudes in Southeastern Ukraine, Crimea, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria."

[114] Sasse and Lackner, "War and Identity: The Case of the Donbas in Ukraine."

[115] Snezhnianskie Novosti, "Glava DNR Ob Otmene v Ukrainskom Pasporte Russkogo Iazyka," *Snezhnianskie Novosti*, November 26, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=11849.

cries of indignation, sparkling mischief and so much more. This [linguistic] wealth was transferred to us by our predecessors, and we must protect it.[116]

The relation between the DNR and LNR and the broader Russian space posed complications for identity discourse in DNR and LNR newspapers. On the one hand, not much attention was paid to the idea of belonging to a Russian "world", or of being part of the greater Russian empire. On the other hand, the Russian language and culture were used to distinguish the DNR and the LNR from Ukraine. At the same time, the Ukrainian language was recognised as a "state language" in both the DNR[117] and the LNR[118]. The status of Ukrainian was indeed a common topic of discussion in the newspapers under study. On the one hand, the recognition of Ukrainian as a "state language" was used to signal the lack of discrimination and freedom of people to express themselves without fear of reprisal. As one Tatiana remarked in an article discussing the issue:

> The Ukrainian language is not to blame for the fact that some of its speakers are, to put it mildly, not good people. Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars and over 100 more nationalities live on DNR territory. Donbas is a multinational region, the highlight of which is that all nations represented in it live here peacefully, respecting each other's cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics.[119]

On the other hand, Ukrainian was associated with the Ukrainian state, or more specifically with agents within the state promoting Ukrainian nationalism, and therefore treated with suspicion. In the same article, one Nikolai is quoted as saying:

> The [Ukrainian] nationalists tried […] to impose their ideology, to force us to renounce our history. Everything that is done under duress causes rejection and hostility. Kyiv did everything it could so that Donbas would start to hate the Ukrainian language. Therefore, I would not want it to have the status of a state language in the Donetsk People's Republic.

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[116] Znamia Pobedy, "Prodolzhenie Sleduet...," *Znamia Pobedy*, June 23, 2016, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=33881.

[117] Narodnyi Sovet Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki, "Konstitutsiia Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki," www.gb-dnr.com, 2018, http://gb-dnr.com/normativno-pravovye-akty/3977/.

[118] Narodnyi Sovet Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki, "Konstitutsiia Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki," www.nslnr.su, 2014, https://nslnr.su/zakonodatelstvo/konstitutsiya/.

[119] Znamia Pobedy, "Chto Luchshe - Dva Ili Odin?," *Znamia Pobedy*, November 27, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=12279.

The Russian language as a topic of discussion in DNR and LNR newspapers thus consists of three components: to promote the identification of the DNR and LNR with Russian and the "Russian World" (rare); to promote the idea of the DNR and LNR as tolerant towards linguistic and other minorities; and to draw a contrast with Ukraine, which was portrayed as discriminatory towards Russian-speakers.

Finally, the term Donbas is almost absent in table 16 (except in topic Novorossiia-01). This, however, does not mean that the term was never used in identity discourse, only that it was not prominent enough to show up in the model. For example, the quotation below shows how it is used to draw a contrast with Ukraine; the parts of Donbas that separated from Ukraine in 2014 were conflated with the rest of the region:

> [Ukraine claims that] Ukraine is conducting an anti-terrorist operation against terrorists and Russian aggressors. It wasn't Donetsk and Luhansk that attacked Kyiv, but the other way around. Out of all the regions [of Ukraine] that didn't join Euromaidan, only Donbas managed to rise up in arms.[120]

Thus, the most important ingroup-focused discourse in DNR and LNR newspapers centred on the Russian language. Other tropes that one would expect to play a significant role, such as "Novorossiia", the "Russian World" or even "Donbas" were, rather surprisingly, either largely absent or underspecified and ill-defined.

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[120] XXI Vek, "Tri otveta 'Evromaidanshchikam,'" *XXI Vek*, May 31, 2017, http://xxiveklnr.su/novosti/1389-tri-otveta-evromaydanschikam.html.

4.3.3.2 Outgroup identity

The outgroup that was discursively constructed in DNR and LNR newspapers relates first and foremost to Ukraine. The narrative of guilt and loss at the hands of Ukraine becomes visible, firstly, in news outlets' coverage of the Donbas conflict. A common point of discussion was the damage done to buildings and people by the Ukrainian military. For example, an article in *Golos Respubliki* noted the following:

> On Tuesday, November 17, Sergei Naumets, Minister of Construction and Housing and Public Utilities of the DNR, spoke about the second stage of the restoration of social facilities and housing that has been destroyed as a result of the hostilities […]: 'As you know, 1.676 social facilities have been destroyed, 4.112 apartment buildings and 14.954 private housing units. 1.500 of these are beyond repair.[121]

Such articles are common throughout the corpus, emphasising the horrors that Ukraine was inflicting on Donbas. Another common trope were attacks on civilian residents of the DNR or LNR by the Ukrainian army, as evident in the following article from *Kazachii Vestnik*:

> On October 11, Ukrainian soldiers fired at civilians with light artillery during an unauthorised crossing of the Severskii Donetsk river.[122]

The Minsk agreements were also discussed. Particular attention was paid to portraying Ukraine as in violation of the pact and active in the use of excessive force[123]. In an interview with *Novaia Niva*, Aleksandr Zakharchenko was asked if he saw a way out of the conflict. In his answer, he focused both on Ukraine's military weakness and its lack of readiness to engage in ceasefire negotiations:

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[121] Golos Respubliki, "111 Semei Poluchat Novye Doma," *Golos Respubliki*, November 20, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=10960.

[122] Kazachii Vestnik, "Opasnaia Pereprava," *Kazachii Vestnik*, October 19, 2016, http://kazache.ru/#newspaper/kazachiy-vestnik-100/opasnaja-pereprava-9.

[123] XXI Vek, "Deinego: Zasedanie Podgruppy Po Bezopasnosti Perenositsia Iz-Za Podryva Avtomobiliia OBSE," *XXI Vek*, April 24, 2017, http://xxiveklnr.su/novosti/669-deynego-zasedanie-podgruppy-po-bezopasnosti-perenositsya-iz-za-podryva-avtomobilya-obse.html.; XXI Vek, "Boeviki Razmestili Na Linii Soprikosnoveniia Tanki, RSZO 'Grad' i SAU," *XXI Vek*, April 15, 2017, http://xxiveklnr.su/novosti/528-boeviki-razmestili-na-linii-soprikosnoveniya-tanki-rszo-grad-i-sau.html.

Do you remember that they attacked us? We were not the initiators of the conflict. And therefore it does not only depend on us when it ends. Unfortunately, Ukraine still hasn't lost hope of resolving this conflict by force. She does not want to learn from her mistakes. In recent days, a gap has appeared – a change in the opinion among the Western curators of Ukraine – but it is not yet possible to say whether this will lead to the end of the war by the end of the year. [What would be] a way out? There are still two options. Either Ukraine goes on the offensive to erase its mistakes, and loses, or Ukraine makes concessions and takes real steps towards a political settlement.[124]

Ukraine was thus described as having initiated the conflict with Donbas, both by leaving Donbas no choice but to opt for separatism after the events on Euromaidan of February 2014 and by initiating military operations against the DNR and LNR later that same year. In addition, Ukraine was portrayed as guilty of excessive violence and being willing to destroy Donbas with reckless abandon, despite having coexisted relatively peacefully for about 25 years.

Second, a large number of articles discussed ongoing affairs in Ukraine – not only the state or the government, but also its people. Tables 17 and 18 on the next two pages show all topics across the corpus that relate to Ukraine. A substantial number of topics in table 17 associate the term Ukraine with the Minsk agreements (e.g. Donetsk Vechernii-07, Enakievskii Rabochii-09, Golos Respubliki-03, Nash Ilovaisk-05 and Rodina-07). Other politics-related terms are common as well, such as "elections" (vybory), "political [adj.]" (politicheskii) and "primaries" (praimeriz). The dynamic topic drawn from the *Makeevskii Rabochii*-corpus identifies a similar relationship (see table 18), moving from Ukraine being discussed within the context of national politics (being identified with words like "member of parliament" [deputat], "candidate" [kandidat] and names of politicians such as the MP for Makeevka, Vitalii Omel'chenko) to references to conflict negotiations between the DNR/LNR and Ukraine.

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[124] Novaia Niva, "Aleksandr Zakharchenko: 'My Stali Splochennee,'" *Novaia Niva*, September 26, 2016, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=41101.

Newspaper & topic no.	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8	Term 9	Term 10
Donetsk Vechernii-07	elections (vybor-)	Ukraine (ukrain-)	Minsk	Kyiv (kiev)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	primaries (praimeriz)	Kyiv (ki-)	agreement (soglashen-)	power (vlast-)	OSCE (obs-)
Enakievskii Rabochii-09	Ukraine (ukrain-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	this (et-)	Donbas	Russia (ross-)	Minsk	Kyiv (kiev)	political (politichesk-)	Poroshenko (poroshenk-)	power (vlast-)
Golos Respubliki-03	Ukraine (ukrain-)	Minsk	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	this (et-)	agreement (soglashen-)	side (storon-)	elections (vybor-)	Kyiv (kiev)	Donbas	Kyiv (ki-)
Kazachii Vestnik-01	this (et-)	which (kotor-)	Ukraine (ukrain-)	country (stran-)	year (god)	one's (svo-)	self (sam-)	so (tak)	each other (drug)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)
Kazachii Vestnik-08	Poroshenko (poroshenk-)	president (prezident)	Ukraine (ukrain-)	Saakashvili (saakashv-)	MP (deputat)	political (politichesk-)	Euromaidan (maida-)	power (vlast-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	Oligarch (oligarkh-)
Kazachii Vestnik-11	Ukraine (ukrain-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	Donbas	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	Minsk	Kyiv (kiev)	side (storon-)	territory (territor-)	Donetsk	blockade (blokad-)
Kochegarka DNR-01	this (et-)	our (nash-)	Ukraine (ukrain-)	which (kotor-)	year (god)	one's (svo-)	people (liud-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	city (gorod)	new (nov-)
Nash Ilovaisk-05	Ukraine (ukrain-)	this (et-)	Minsk	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	state (gosudarstv-)	power (vlast-)	Kyiv (kiev)	which (kotor-)	our (nash-)	political (politichesk-)
Novaia Niva-04	Ukraine (ukrain-)	this (et-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	Minsk	republic (respublik-)	one's (svo-)	Donbas	DNR	power (vlast-)	Zakharchenko (zakharchenk-)
Novaia Zhizn'-03	Ukraine (ukrain-)	Minsk	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	this (et-)	our (nash-)	republic (respublik-)	Donbas	Kyiv (kiev)	elections (vybor-)	political (politichesk-)
Novye Gorizonty-09	Ukraine (ukrain-)	Minsk	signing (podpis-)	Donbas	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	peaceful (mirn-)	our (nash-)	agreement (soglashen-)	republic (respublik-)	resident (zhitel-)
Novyi Luch-04	Ukraine (ukrain-)	this (et-)	our (nash-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	Minsk	which (kotor-)	republic (respublik-)	state (gosudarstv-)	DNR	power (vlast-)
Rodina-07	Ukraine (ukrain-)	republic (respublik-)	Minsk	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	Donbas	Donetsk	DNR	our (nash-)	people's (narodn-)	Russia (ross-)
Rodnoe Priazov'e-02	Ukraine (ukrain-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	this (et-)	Russia (ross-)	which (kotor-)	Crimea (krym)	Poroshenko (poroshenk-)	country (stran-)	one's (svo-)	Russian (rossiisk-)
Snezhnianskie Novosti-05	Ukraine (ukrain-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	this (et-)	Minsk	our (nash-)	Donbas	republic (respublik-)	power (vlast-)	DNR	elections (vybor-)
Vestnik DNR-01	Ukraine (ukrain-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	this (et-)	country (stran-)	which (kotor-)	one's (svo-)	Russia (ross-)	power (vlast-)	so (tak)	Donbas
XpressKlub-10	Ukraine (ukrain-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	Donbas	Kyiv (kiev)	territory (territor-)	Poroshenko (poroshenk-)	Crimea (krym)	announce (zaiav-)	country (stran-)	Kyiv (ki-)
Znamia Pobedy-04	Ukraine (ukrain-)	Minsk	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	this (et-)	agreement (soglashen-)	Kyiv (kiev)	Donbas	power (vlast-)	elections (vybor-)	side (storon-)

Table 17: Topics related to Ukraine

Rank	Overall	2012-Jan 2013	Dec 2013-Feb 2015	Mar 2015-Nov 2016
1	ukraine (ukrain-)	MP (deputat)	ukraine (ukrain-)	ukraine (ukrain-)
2	MP (deputat)	people's (narodn-)	country (stran-)	Minsk
3	people's (narodn-)	ukraine (ukrain-)	MP (deputat)	ukrainian (ukrainsk-)
4	country (stran-)	Vitalii (vital-)	people's (narodn-)	LNR
5	ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	party (part-)	decision (reshen-)	agreement (soglashen-)
6	Minsk	Valerii (valer-)	power (vlast-)	negotiations (peregovor)
7	president (prezident)	board (bort-)	state (adj.) (gosudarstvenn-)	Donbas
8	party (part-)	district (okrug-)	ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	elections (vybor-)
9	Valerii (valer-)	candidate (kandidat)	situation (situats-)	USA (SShA)
10	elections (vybor-)	Omel'chenko	minister (ministr)	president (prezident)

Table 18: Dynamic topic related to Ukraine (Makeevskii Rabochii-5)

What the topic model cannot pick up on, but what is very clear when looking at newspaper articles in more detail, is that the ostensibly nebulous concept of "Ukraine" was portrayed in various highly detailed ways. Much ink was spent revisiting the root causes of the conflict, focusing in particular on the role of the new Ukrainian authorities. The post-Maidan Ukrainian government was described as "fascist" and "neo-Nazi", having come to power after an unlawful "coup d'état":

> We cherish pleasant and joyful memories while trying to forget the moments of grief and sorrow, but things can happen that are impossible to get over or forget […] As soon as the Ukrainian people forgot about the horrors of the Great Patriotic War, brought upon our land by the Nazi invaders, neo-Nazism began to flourish in the country. What happened in Ukraine was a coup. Units of "Pravyi Sektor" members (pravoseki) and similar elements marched through its cities. A new order came to power in the state that went under the name of Ukraine – one without the right to freedom, a native language, a culture, a history ... The organisers of this coup d'état in the capital probably did not expect that Donbas would refuse to tolerate this judicial chaos and the impunity espoused by the gangs of Euromaidanists (evromaidanovtsy). Through peaceful rallies and demonstrations, residents of the East tried to get through to the Kyiv regime and the international community, but instead of understanding and open dialogue, they received terror and political repression.[125]

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[125] Znamia Pobedy, "Gran', Cherez Kotoruiu Uzhe Ne Perestupit'," *Znamia Pobedy*, August 31, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=2540.

The Ukrainian government was commonly described as a failure, ruining its economy at the behest of Western powers and destroying its societal make-up:

> During their two years in government, Ukrainian politicians, raised to the pinnacle of power by the overwhelming Maidan wave, have demonstrated their utter inconsistency. Ukraine has actually lost state sovereignty, industry and agriculture, has ruined its financial system, and is now also destroying the social sphere, clearly demonstrating, together with its Western puppeteers, its essence, which is frankly anti-people.[126]

The events of 2014 were portrayed as a seminal moment. The fragile relationship between Ukraine and Donbas was severed by the Ukrainian government and army:

> It is possible to rebuild the walls that have been destroyed, but it is impossible to restore the broken souls, which in Ukraine have been methodically destroyed over the years. A lot was wrong during the 25 years of independence in Ukraine. While Donbas was a part of this state, many negative changes took place on our territory. During these years of 'independence', the economy has degraded, along with the cultural and spiritual sphere. The standard of living for most of the population has fallen by several times compared to the Soviet period, and crime has increased.[127]

A variety of words was used to paint a vivid and detailed picture of the enemy: "radical" forces in Ukraine, with the people's approval, took hold of power by force in collaboration with Western powers and NATO. The illustrative article below sought to explain the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 in July 2014[128]. We see a number of familiar tropes re-emerge:

> In the skies of Donbas, junta[129] troops committed a terrible crime: the shooting down of a Malaysian Airlines Boeing 777 en route from Amsterdam to Kuala

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[126] Vestnik DNR, "Sotsial'naia Zashchita Po Obe Storony Linii Razgranicheniia," *Vestnik DNR*, February 11, 2016, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=21407.

[127] Vash Ilovaisk, "Poka My Byli V 'nezalezhnoi,'" *Vash Ilovaisk*, September 5, 2016, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=39965.

[128] The Joint Investigation Team, an international team of researchers in charge of investigating the cause of the crash, and the Dutch Safety Board, the second investigative body, has concluded that the BUK-TELAR missile that took down flight MH17 was fired from DNR-occupied territory and belonged to the 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade of the Russian army Landelijk Parket, "Update in Criminal Investigation MH17 Disaster.".

[129] Junta = the Kyiv government.

Lumpur, killing 298 innocent civilians from Europe and southeast Asia, among which at least three children. The authorities of the neo-Nazi Ukraine immediately began to lob accusations at the militia (opolchentsy), throw around demands for letting NATO troops [into the country], accusing [us] of terrorism, et cetera.[130]

The lack of success of demonstrations against the new Kyiv government organised in other cities and regions both inside and outside of Donbas was not explained or justified in detail:

Massive political demonstrations, which occurred in practically all of south-eastern Ukraine, were the response to the coup d'état in Kyiv after the so-called 'Euromaidan', which happened in February 2014 and which led to the arrival to power of nationalist political forces. The change of power only sharpened the mutual relations between the western and eastern parts of the country, and the new leadership of Ukraine refused to take into account the interests and opinions of the residents of the southeast, and in particular Donbas. Apart from this, the attempts by far-right movements to spread their influence and apply forceful methods only aggravated the situation and evoked a wave of protests in the Kharkiv, Odessa, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts. But if this cruel position of the authorities led to the submission of protest movements in these regions, the resistance in Donbas only grew stronger.[131]

Throughout the corpus, Ukraine is commonly assigned blame for suppressing legitimate protests. These themes of shame, bad governance, violent state capture and submission to the West appeared throughout both DNR and LNR newspapers. The dominant Ukraine-related narrative emerging from discussions in these papers implies that there was no way back to the status quo ante because of Ukraine's actions.

The citations above are from editorials and news articles by DNR and LNR journalists. In other cases, however, the dissemination of these themes came directly from the top. Aleksandr Zakharchenko was quoted regularly in DNR newspapers, occasionally weighing in on the matter of identity and how the DNR came to be independent. When

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[130] Novorossia, "Katastrofa v Nebe," *Novorossia*, August 27, 2016, http://novopressa.ru/articles/katastrofa-v-nebe.html.
[131] Xpress-Klub, "My Ne Khoteli Ni S Kem Voevat'," *Xpress-Klub*, April 19, 2016, http://xpressclub.ru/news/page/274.

asked about the origins of the DNR, Zakharchenko skipped over the matter of Donbas identity and focused instead on Ukraine's history of ignoring and dismissing Donbas[132]:

> *Interviewer*: How did the Donetsk People's Republic begin for you personally?
> *Zakharchenko*: With a dream. I always dreamed of an independent, prosperous Donetsk state as part of the Russian world. I think many people in our region have dreamed of the same. Ukrainian politicians understood what the people wanted, and in their election programs and populist slogans constantly promised integration with the Russian Federation, recognition of the Russian language, and more self-government. They promised it but they always deceived [us]. The events of 2013–2014 served as a catalyst for the creation of the DNR. The coup d'état in Kiev, the rise of radical nationalists to power, the repression of all those who disagreed, the Odessa-Khatyn [massacre][133]. All these events clearly showed that it was impossible to wait any longer, for when yet another deceitful politician finally fulfills his promise and hears the voice of Donbas. If today we do not oppose this kind of brutal impunity, tomorrow we will be destroyed.

Zakharchenko here evades a discussion about ingroup identity and magnifies the divisions between the DNR and Ukraine. His quote is exemplary of the way Ukraine was portrayed in DNR and LNR media as a well-defined outgroup, against which DNR and LNR identity was contrasted. This contrasting may be interpreted as an example of what Rogers Brubaker calls "inter-field monitoring" by an identity-shaping actor. Brubaker sees national minority, nationalising state and external national homeland not as "analytically irreducible entities" but rather as a triadic relationship in which relational "fields" are in constant competition[134]. A key aspect of this triadic relationship is "reciprocal field monitoring", where actors in each field continuously and attentively monitor and interpret the actions of actors in other fields, as well as the (evolving) relations between them. This monitoring is active rather than passive, and involves "selective attention, interpretation and representation". Crucially, Brubaker mentions

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[132] Iasinovatskii Vestnik, "Nachalo Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki (Aleksandr Zakharchenko)," *Iasinovatskii Vestnik*, December 6, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=13500.

[133] Zakharchenko is referring to the fire in the Odessa Trade Unions building on May 2, 2014, in which 48 people died and around 250 were injured after the building caught fire from petrol bombs during clashes between groups of demonstrators. He likens this event to the Khatyn Massacre of 1940, in which forces of the Nazi Schultzmannschaft Battalion 118 slaughtered, through the use of fire (and gunfire), nearly 150 men, women and children in the Belarusian village of Khatyn.

[134] Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, 67–68.

that the "struggle to mobilise a national minority may be linked to the struggle to represent the host state as a nationalising or nationally oppressive state". While there are clear differences between the clearly "national" identity that is the subject of construction in the area of Brubaker's interest (former Yugoslavia) and identity in the DNR and LNR, the concept of inter-field monitoring is nonetheless useful in this context. The clear focus on outgroup identity in DNR and LNR newspapers may be seen as an effort on behalf of the authorities to mobilise local residents, which in turn depends on an effort to represent Ukraine as a "dangerous nationalising state". This way, the "national minority" field, here represented by the DNR and LNR, seeks to shape and distort "perceptions and representations" of the "nationalising state" field (in the form of Ukraine)[135]. Whether this relationship is reciprocal, i.e. whether Ukraine engages in inter-field monitoring by shaping or distorting representations and perceptions of the DNR and LNR, lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, but some insights may be found in works of scholarship that look at Ukrainians' perceptions of the DNR and LNR and their identity, such as the work of Anna Fournier[136] and Dominque Arel[137].

A second element to consider is the extent to which DNR and LNR media discourses reflect the idea of the DNR and LNR as a borderland, wedged between Ukraine and Russia, in their relation to ingroup identity. Borderlands studies is a field of scholarship that has seen a surge in popularity in recent years, the focus of which is to investigate the "contested boundaries between colonial domains"[138]. Donbas has long been seen as a "wild" frontier and borderland that has traditionally refused to subject itself to a centralising authority[139]. After the collapse of the Soviet empire, Donbas once again found itself wedged inbetween two nations, while itself remaining sceptical of nationalism[140]. Tatiana Zhurzhenko's work on shifting identities in border villages in the region of Slobozhanshchyna (in the Kharkiv and Belgorod oblasts in Ukraine and Russia, respectively), can offer insight into this matter. While there are clear differences between Slobozhanshchyna and Donbas, and recognising that conclusions about one

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[135] Ibid., 69.
[136] Anna Fournier, "From Frozen Conflict to Mobile Boundary: Youth Perceptions of Territoriality in War-Time Ukraine," *East European Politics and Societies* 32, no. 1 (2018): 23–55, https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325417740627.
[137] Dominique Arel, "How Ukraine Has Become More Ukrainian," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 34, no. 2–3 (2018): 186–89, https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2018.1445460.
[138] Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History," *American Historical Review* 104 (1999): 815–41.
[139] Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870s-1990s*, 3.
[140] Ibid., 4.

region should may not be applicable in others, there are nonetheless valuable insights to be gained from her work. Zhurzhenko argues that in 2003 and 2004, the Ukrainian-Russian borderlands in Kharkiv and Belgorod oblasts still "appeared a non-differentiated 'Soviet' space"[141], which kept to old Soviet customs alongside new Ukrainian and Russian ones. This element of Soviet nostalgia was not present in DNR and LNR newspaper discourse. In fact, whereas Zhurzhenko argues that the porosity of the border is a key element of Slobozhanshchyna identity, which began to clash with nationalisation policies implemented by the Western-leaning Iushchenko government after the Orange Revolution in 2004, DNR and LNR newspapers only made reference to part of this narrative: the nationalisation policies by Ukraine, as represented by its armed forces as well as its central government's "fascist" tendencies, were emphasised, whereas an ingroup identity that envisions Donetsk and Luhansk as borderlands where porosity, fluidity and intergroup contact are key elements of local identity, was given little attention. In addition, DNR and LNR media did not follow the same patterns of identity building that Zhurzhenko observed on the Russian side of the border. She argues that in Belgorod oblast, which borders Kharkiv oblast in the Russian Federation, the "new historical narrative integrates not only symbols of the imperial Russian past but also, selectively, Soviet myths and symbols", while at the same time the "making of Russians does not require the unmaking of 'Soviets'"[142]. Or, in other words, on the Ukrainian side of the border in Slobozhanshchyna, an affirmative nationalisation policy was pursued, whereas no such process occurred on the Russian side; rather, Russian identity was asserted through "active cultural politics" such as the founding of the Belgorod State University and the commemoration of Russian military glory through World War II, along with a degree of Soviet nostalgia. There thus appears to be an important element of overlap between DNR/LNR and Slobozhanshchyna identity building, as well as clear differences: like in Belgorod oblast, ingroup identity was not explicitly asserted by referring to a large body of identity markers, attributes, practices and imports in DNR and LNR newspapers, apart from a clear affinity with the memory of World War II. Unlike in Belgorod oblast, however, Soviet nostalgia was largely absent in DNR and LNR newspaper discourse. Also unlike in Slobozhanshchyna, outgroup identity in DNR and LNR media discourse was asserted

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[141] Tatiana Zhurzhenko, *Borderlands into Bordered Lands: Geopolitics of Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2010), 273.
[142] Ibid., 278.

explicitly and often by focusing on the "enemy" Ukraine, thus discursively constructing a "hard" symbolic border that is permeated and made somewhat porous through references to a history of peaceful coexistence that Ukraine has violated, thus leaving the DNR and LNR with no option but to choose a different path.

Finally, articles about politics framed Ukraine as a weak state, subservient to the West (Europe, the US and/or NATO). Table 19 on the next page shows the topics relating to both domestic and international politics. Two main sub-themes dominated political discussions: United States foreign policy and DNR/LNR elections. Discussions about US foreign policy mirrored discussions in parts of Russian and American media[143] that allude to a "deep state", which, unbeholden to election results or the "consent of the governed", is running the country behind the scenes[144]. The United States was thus portrayed as a puppet master[145] that Ukraine was unable and unwilling to resist:

> The 'deep state' of the United States can no longer hold the world in the soft paws of the 'liberal world order'[146]. It needs enemies to show off its predator's claws and strong beak for the edification of the disgruntled. And to achieve this goal, it does not hesitate to use even the 'last refuge of scoundrels' (poslednee pribezhishche negodiaiev)[147], which the Banderovite Ukraine has become today.[148]

Discussions related to DNR and LNR elections also emphasised their democratic character[149]. The 2016 "primary elections" (praimeriz) in the DNR were ofen referred to as an example of successful democratic elections in an attempt to contest Ukraine's allegations of ballot manipulations[150].

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[143] Mikhailova, "Sravnitel'nyi Analiz Osveshcheniia Rosiiskimi I Amerikanskimi SMI Krizisa v Donbase."; Stephen Hutchings and Joanna Szostek, "Dominant Narratives in Russian Political and Media Discourse during the Ukraine Crisis," in *Ukraine and Russia*, ed. Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilcewska and Richard Sakwa (United Kingdom: E-International Relations Publishing, 2015), https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/files/64532405/Dominant_Narrative_Ukraine_Russia_Hutchings_Szostek.pdf.
[144] Mike Lofgren, "Anatomy of the Deep State," *Www.billmoyers.com*, 2014, https://billmoyers.com/2014/02/21/anatomy-of-the-deep-state/.
[145] Marta Vetrova, "Masterstvo Perevoploshcheniia," *Novorossia*, July 22, 2017, http://novopressa.ru/articles-535.html.
[146] Note that the language used here follows Aleksandr Dugin, see: Dugin, "Rozhdenie Novorossii."
[147] 'Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel' is a quote by Samuel Johnson, a 17th-century English writer and poet.
[148] Kazachii Vestnik, "Ni Shagu Nazad: V Narodnoi Militsii LNR Oprovergli Informatsiiu O Prodvizhenii VSU Na Svetlodarskoi Duge," *Kazachii Vestnik*, August 9, 2017, http://kazache.ru/#newspaper/kazachiy-vestnik-142/.
[149] Donetsk Vechernii, "Aleksandr Zakharchenko: Praimeriz - Eto Ucheniia," *Donetsk Vechernii*, May 25, 2016, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=31171.
[150] Kochegarka DNR, "V Gorlovke Startovali Praimeriz," *Kochegarka DNR*, July 29, 2016, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=37638.

Newspaper & topic no.	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8	Term 9	Term 10
Golos Respubliki-02	law (zakon)	bill (zakonoproekt)	people's (narodn-)	MP (deputat)	republic (respublik-)	reading (chten-)	right (prav-)	activity (deiatel'n-)	council (sovet)	committee (komitet)
Novorossiia-03	Trump (tramp)	president (prezident)	American (amerikansk-)	USA (SShA)	meeting (vstrech-)	America (amerik-)	elections (vybor-)	illegitimate president (nedoprezident)	partner (partner)	former (nyneshn-)
Vestnik DNR-03	elections (vybor-)	Minsk	agreement (soglashen-)	negotiation (peregovor-)	Donbas	Poroshenko (poroshenk-)	Kyiv (ki-)	OSCE (obs-)	carrying out (vypolnen-)	LNR
Vestnik DNR-05	primaries (praimeriz)	voting (golosovan-)	electoral (izbiratel'n-)	candidate (kandidat)	commission (komiss-)	conducting (proveden-)	preliminary (predvaritel'n-)	electoral (izbiratel'n-)	elections (vybor-)	societal (obshchestven-)
Vestnik DNR-08	court (sud-)	justicial (sudebn-)	justice (iustits-)	right (prav-)	Verkhovna (verkhovn-)	organ (organ)	convention (konvents-)	criminal (ugolovn-)	conform (sootvetstv-)	crime (prestuplen-)
XpressKlub-03	USA (SShA)	Trump (tramp)	president (prezident)	American (amerikansk-)	announce (zaiav-)	North Korea (kndr)	country (stran-)	sanctions (sankts-)	against (prot-)	Putin

Table 19: Topics related to politics

4.4 Conclusion

Three main narratives were identified in a large sample of DNR and LNR newspaper articles: "business as usual", war and memory, and loss and guilt. The first narrative is the largest, consisting of more than 50% (126 out of 252) of all topics in the corpus. Newspapers in the DNR and LNR to a large extent continued to perform "typical" activities as a source of information for local communities, reporting on sports, entertainment, local affairs and cultural events[151]. This was done without regularly infusing reports with identity discourse.

Sports is a good example. Local sports can play a role in spurring community development, particularly during times of conflict[152]. In the DNR and LNR, the authorities deemed it important to get sports back on the agenda as soon as possible after the outbreak of the conflict. And indeed, "national" football teams and sports leagues were quickly established. However, while the motivation behind doing so may have been (in part) motivated by a need to establish a local collective identity, there is more evidence that this was done as a means to keep the local population entertained; one sign of this is that Ukrainian sports channels were quickly put back on air after locals protested their being banned by the authorities along with all other Ukrainian television channels. Most sports reports were also rather typical, containing basic information about the match or tournament; account for who won or lost; and in the case of a sports achievement by a local resident, elaborating on this person's success. But there is little indication that sports, writ large, was deployed as a significant means to shape identity in the DNR and the LNR.

The same can be said for the other "typical" topics of discussion that make up the majority of DNR and LNR newspaper coverage: education, weather, and the local economy. A significant proportion of space in newspapers was dedicated to fairly mundane topics like potholes, upcoming concerts, a coal mine's productivity, and so on. This practice indicates a partial mobilisation of local news as a means for identity

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[151] Nielsen, "Local Newspapers as Keystone Media: The Increased Importance of Diminished Newspapers for Local Political Information Environments."; Hindman, "Community Newspapers, Community Structural Pluralism, and Local Conflict with Nonlocal Groups."

[152] Waquet and Vincent, "Wartime Rugby and Football: Sports Elites, French Military Teams and International Meets during the First World War."; Porter, "Sport and National Identity."

building: while identity discourse is certainly found on the pages of DNR and LNR newspapers, it is not the case that it permeated every topic of discussion.

Nonetheless, a significant part of coverage on the pages of these newspapers (91 out of 252 topics, or 36.1%) did address and contribute to the shaping and development of identity. The Donbas war was, expectedly, a major topic of discussion, but it was explored primarily in two ways: 1) through reports of the damage wrought by the war, emphasising particularly Ukraine's ceasefire violations and acts of aggression; and 2) by drawing connections between the current conflict and World War II. The frame of being under attack by a "fascist" or "neo-Nazi" invader was highly prevalent in this discussion. The actions of the outgroup, the invader – not the actions of the ingroup, the DNR and LNR troops – were the point of focus. Here, DNR and LNR media mimic Russian state media, which have relied heavily on collective memories of World War II to shape perceptions of the Euromaidan movement and the post-Euromaidan Ukrainian government[153].

Holidays were a common way of fostering, implicitly and explicitly, a collective commemoration, embrace and celebration of identity[154]. Here, too, there was a focus on past suffering, particularly in connection with World War II. The term "Donbas" was in some cases used to draw a contrast between the DNR and LNR and Ukraine. At the same time, there was a relative absence of tropes connecting the DNR and LNR with Russian identity. "Novorossiia" and the "Russian World" played a small role in newspaper coverage. Only one publication (*Novorossiia*) paid significant attention to the former; other newspapers barely mentioned the term. This clear under-emphasis in newspaper discourse problematises conventional wisdom about the importance of "Novorossiia" in local identity[155]. The "Russian World" identity attribute, despite its common usage by important figures like Vladimir Putin, was also not as evident as assumed[156]. Much the same can be said for the other references to historical identity

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[153] Christina Cottiero et al., "War of Words: The Impact of Russian State Television on the Russian Internet," *Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 43, no. 4 (2015): 533–55, https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2015.1013527; Elizaveta Gaufmann, "World War II 2.0: Digital Memory of Fascism in Russia in the Aftermath of Euromaidan in Ukraine," *Journal of Regional Security* 10, no. 1 (2015): 17–36.

[154] Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.,

[155] O'Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov, "The Rise and Fall of 'Novorossiya': Examining Support for a Separatist Geopolitical Imaginary in Southeast Ukraine."; Laruelle, "The Three Colors of Novorossiya, or the Russian Nationalist Mythmaking of the Ukrainian Crisis."

[156] O'Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov, "Who Identifies with the 'Russian World'? Geopolitical Attitudes in Southeastern Ukraine, Crimea, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria."

that have been floated by the DNR and LNR leadership (see chapter 1): indeed, "Malorossiia", the Donetsk-Kryvoi Rog Soviet Republic and the idea of Donbas as an independent region of industrial workers played almost no part in DNR and LNR newspapers. The Soviet Union, meanwhile, was also almost entirely absent in identity discourse. There is not much indication that these newspapers hearkened back to the Soviet era as a precursor to the emergence of the DNR and LNR.

The Russian language, described as the "language of the land" in the DNR and LNR, was held in high regard. At the same time, Ukrainian was portrayed as a language that people in the DNR and LNR have little use for, despite being officially recognised as a "state" language in both territories. This latter point was emphasised as a way to draw a contrast with Ukraine, which was portrayed as acting in discriminatory fashion towards Russian-speaking people in terms of its language policy.

The above discussion leads to the conclusion that descriptions of the ingroup remained impoverished. The DNR and LNR were defined only by their counterparts: more attention was paid to what they are not than to what they are or want to be. This conclusion is in line with Kateryna Boyko's, who argues that the newspaper *Novorossia* projected an incoherent ideology to its readers, devoid of a consistent set of ideals[157]. This incoherence is perhaps best exemplified by a speech by Aleksandr Zakharchenko, which is worth quoting in full:

> From the beginning of the war, when I was communicating with my comrades, friends, I asked them a question: what are we fighting for? I wanted to hear the opinion of various residents of our state. The answers were very diverse, but for the most part they overlapped: we are fighting for our home, for our family, for our land, for our Motherland, for Russia, for freedom ... The most important thing for which we are fighting is for the freedom (svoboda) of Donbass. And then a second word appeared: 'justice' (spravedlivost'). We have risen up for the justice that we regard as the cornerstone of our soul, our statehood. In addition to that, in a fair society, it is very important to achieve universal equality (ravenstvo) at all levels. Later, when talking to students, we brought up another

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[157] Boyko, "Mediating Alternative Statehood: A Case Study of Dabiq and Novorossiya Publications."

important concept of our ideology – 'conscience' (sovest'). Any Russian person wants to live according to his conscience, and live in a state based on the principles of conscience. These words formed the basis of the ideology that I submitted to society for discussion. If you take the first letters of these words – 'freedom' (svoboda), 'justice' (spravedlivost'), 'conscience' (sovest'), 'equality' (ravenstvo) – and put them together, you get SSSR (the Russian acronym for the USSR). We will not argue over whether this project was successful or not, but it was an attempt to build a fair state on the basis of equality. Today we have the opportunity to do this. Not to repeat it, but to build it from scratch. Therefore, these words formed the basis of the ideology that I have been carrying in my heart all this time. Without ideology, a state cannot exist. We can be successful in a war, we can build an economy, but when there is no essence, no inner fulfillment, any such process is doomed to fail. People need to understand what we do, for what purpose, and, most importantly, how we will do it. Can you name at least one state that in such a short time was able to accomplish the things that we have done? You cannot. All of the inhabitants of the Republic performed a miracle that no one has achieved before us. And our task is not only to create the right ideology, but also to bring it to every inhabitant. To make it so that these principles are already assimilated by children at school. Therefore, ideology implies both the lessons of statehood and the correct teaching of true history. A history in which the heroes – that is [Donbas-born infantry soldier and Hero of the Soviet Union Aleksandr Matveevich] Matrosov, the defenders of Stalingrad – and the winners are the soldiers who stormed the Reichstag. And the villains are the Banderovtsy[158] and the fascists. And the story must be true. We must remember that we had warriors who nailed a shield to the gates of Constantinople. We should not forget that our ancestors defeated the Swedes near Poltava… Thousands of battles in which the heroism of our ancestors was glorified. We must remember the story that was: BAM[159], DneproGES[160], the five-year plans, constructing a state. These are things that should not be

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[158] "Banderovtsy" (after the Ukrainian nationalist and partisan Stepan Bandera) is a term commonly used in a derogative manner to describe Ukrainian nationalists.
[159] BAM most likely refers to the Baikalo-Amurskaia Magistral', or the Baikal-Amur Mainline, a broad gauge railway that runs parallel to the famous Trans-Siberian Railway.
[160] DneproGES (ДнепроГЭС), or the Dniepr Hydroelectric Station, is the name of the largest hydroelectric dam on the Dnipro river.

forgotten. It is necessary to remember both the victories and the mistakes that were made.[161]

When asked about the DNR's ideology, Zakharchenko employed a wide variety of identity attributes and imports without settling on any one in particular. He flirted with the idea of the DNR being imbibed with a post-Soviet legacy, while also reiterating the importance of World War II, the history's region of coal mining, and even the emergence of the Russian Empire in the early 18th century. The task at hand was to "create the right ideology", indicating a lack of coherence in how to proceed with the construction of identity, despite acknowledging its importance.

This impoverished ingroup stands in contrast with the narrative of loss and guilt vis-à-vis the outgroup, Ukraine. Ukraine was perhaps the most significant object of identity discourse in DNR and LNR newspapers, a point of pivot between evolving definitions of ingroup and outgroup. It was variably portrayed as overtaken by a "neo-Nazi" or "fascist" invader, a "junta", a "right-wing radical government" and the result of an illegitimate "coup d'état". It is not the case, however, that Ukrainians or the idea of Ukraine were attacked per se: rather, Ukrainians were represented as guilty of allowing their most radical elements to take over and doing nothing to stop the onslaught of repression against Donbas. Ukraine, its language or its people were therefore not the object of discursive outgroup construction; instead, the focus lay on a narrative of usurpation in which a small group of people took hold of power and embarked on a process of destroying the country. Ultimately, this narrative is centred on behaviour rather than essence: Ukrainians have been led astray by nefarious forces, but reconciliation remains a possibility, provided certain actions are taken. What these actions are is left in the middle.

In the end, this narrative of loss and guilt seeks to provoke an emotional response: outrage at Ukraine's destruction of Donbas and fear of invading radical forces. This weaponisation of strong emotions such as fear and anger is a common tactic in media coverage, as argued by David Altheide[162] and evidenced recently in the context of

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[161] Makeevskii Rabochii, "Volnuiushchie Voprosy - Obstoiatel'nye Otvety," *Makeevskii Rabochii*, December 30, 2015, http://gazeta-dnr.ru//?p=16406.
[162] David L Altheide, "The News Media, the Problem Frame, and the Production of Fear," *The Sociological Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1997): 647–68, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4121084.

Twitter news during the 2016 US elections[163]. Within social identity theory, emotionally affective messaging about outgroups that are directed towards ingroup members have been shown to significantly affect ingroup identification and predict higher levels of prejudice[164]. Thus, the weaponisation of negative emotion directed at outgroups in media discourse can transform how group members view themselves as well as others. DNR and LNR newspaper coverage clearly followed this pattern, demonising the Ukrainian "other" in the process.

In sum, newspaper readers in the DNR and LNR were largely exposed to a typical menu of coverage of local events and to an identity discourse without a sui-generis, unifying coherence. Identity comes into play not so much when talking about the DNR and LNR as "national" entities, but rather when talking about those outside of it, primarily Ukraine and to a smaller extent the Russian Federation. The matter of "why we exist" was not answered in a consistent manner by neither journalists nor the DNR and LNR leadership.

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[163] Daniel Taninecz Miller, "Topics and Emotions in Russian Twitter Propaganda," *First Monday* 24, no. 5 (2019), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v24i5.9638.
[164] Daniel A Miller, Eliot R Smith, and Diane M Mackie, "Effects of Intergroup Contact and Political Predispositions on Prejudice: Role of Intergroup Emotions," *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 7, no. 3 (July 1, 2004): 221–37, https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430204046109.

5 Internet media and identity in the DNR and LNR

5.1 Introduction

The internet makes possible the anonymous, rapid and continuous dissemination of news material to potentially large audiences, both domestic and international. It has enabled groups and governments to overcome some of the limitations inherent to more traditional publishing methods such as print and television[1].

The online sphere not only allows for political news to be consumed globally rather than locally; it also brings opportunities for enhanced dissemination. Content can be shared, liked, reposted and commented on, thus increasing its impact beyond the confines of traditional media. Articles, video clips and social media posts can go viral, including through artificial amplification, e.g. by using Twitter bots or so-called "troll armies"[2] - all of which makes the internet a useful vehicle for authorities and governments to disseminate and amplify political messages. Crucially, these messages can be directed at outgroup audiences, whereas newspapers and television are primarily addressed to and consumed by locals.

Developing an online media strategy is of particular importance during a military conflict. Two motivations inform the need for doing so: legitimising the grievances underlying one's participation in the conflict[3], and delegitimising the opponent by demoralising it or by demonising it in the eyes of third party observers[4]. Domestic audiences can of course also access online content, but they are not its primary intended recipients[5].

Since the start of the Donbas conflict in 2014, 40 news sites were set up that focus on the conflict and the DNR and LNR, publishing primarily in Russian but also in English, French and Swedish[6]. Most of these sites were updated daily, and ran accounts on social media pages such as Vkontakte, Odnoklassniki, Facebook and Twitter. In

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[1] Crilley, "Information Warfare: New Battle Fields Terrorists, Propaganda and the Internet."
[2] Chengcheng Shao et al., "The Spread of Fake News by Social Bots," *CoRR* abs/1707.0 (2017), http://arxiv.org/abs/1707.07592.
[3] Salhani, "Media in Conflict: Inciting Violence in Kosovo."; Edney, "Soft Power and the Chinese Propaganda System."; Deacon and Golding, *Taxation and Representation*.
[4] Ingram, "A Brief History of Propaganda During Conflict."; Szostek, "The Power and Limits of Russia's Strategic Narrative in Ukraine: The Role of Linkage."
[5] Crilley, "Information Warfare: New Battle Fields Terrorists, Propaganda and the Internet."
[6] For more detailed information, see the spreadsheet 'DNR and LNR media landscape overview' in the supplement (file 1.6).

addition, a number of other websites that existed prior to 2014 began publishing from a pro-DNR/LNR perspective around the start of the conflict.

The articles published on these news sites were then further disseminated and discussed on forums, in comment sections, and on social media pages. All of them operated under a publishing licence and were officially approved or were run directly by the DNR or LNR authorities. Analysing the content of these news sites can therefore provide insight into the discursive strategies and themes employed by these authorities to inform external (as opposed to internal) audiences. In this chapter, as in chapter 4, I will again focus on how these discourses and narratives have informed identity construction. I seek to answer the following questions, in line with those of the previous chapter:

- What narratives can be identified in content published on (pro) DNR and LNR internet news outlets?
- How do these narratives relate to identity building in the DNR and LNR?

5.2 Data set

This chapter builds on the previous chapter on print media in the DNR and LNR by focusing exclusively on the online sphere. The methods are the same: corpora of news articles were scraped from the web using the Google Chrome Webscraper[7], after which a quantitative topic modelling analysis was conducted using Non-Negative Matrix Factorisation[8]. The categories identified by the topic modelling analysis have been grouped together into themes. These themes are analysed in-depth through qualitative close reading.

In order to ensure a balance between sites operating from the DNR and LNR, one website from each unrecognised republic was included. The largest English-language news site operating from the DNR/LNR (*DONi News*) was included as well, so as to incorporate coverage intended for the international community into the analysis. Finally, one official state-run news agency (*Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr*) was included, for three reasons: 1) news agencies provide other news organisations, including news sites, with source material and press releases which they can choose to cover or not; 2) as the news agency is run directly by the (in this case) LNR authorities, its publications offer a direct window into the ways authorities attempt to formulate their own discourse online; and 3) the content published online by state-run news agencies is intended for online as well as offline use. Looking at the contrasts between news agency and other news website content can thus highlight the differences in approach between online and offline media outlets towards identity construction in the DNR and LNR. In total, 4 corpora of sufficient size were included in this chapter's data set. Only content between 2015 and 2017 was available due to technical limitations. The final corpus consists of 43.267 documents[9]. The following outlets were included:

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[7] Balodis, "Google Chrome Webscraper."

[8] D. Kuang, J. Choo, and H. Park, "Nonnegative Matrix Factorization for Interactive Topic Modeling and Document Clustering.," in *Partitional Clustering Algorithms*, ed. M. Celebi (Springer, Cham, 2015), 215–43, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-09259-1_7.

[9] The full corpora and descriptive statistics can be found in the supplement (files 5.2 through 5.5).

- *Donetsk International News Agency* (*DONi News*)
  - The main English-language publication from the DNR, founded by Russian businessman Andrei Stepanenko and launched on 15 July 2015[10]. It was run by Finnish former journalist Janus Putkonen. It employed a variety of people from different European countries such as France and the United Kingdom. The website went offline in 2018[11].
- *Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr*
  - The official state press agency of the LNR, providing press releases, interviews and news and opinion articles. It published primarily in Russian, but there was also an English-language version available[12].
- *DNR-24*
  - A news site founded in late 2016 providing daily news updates. In its own words, all information on the site is provided for "informative or educational purposes only"[13].
- *Lugansk1 Info*
  - An information portal started in 2015, focused on "the economy, politics, social life, and the war in Donbas"[14].

Table 20 gives an overview of each of these corpora, and the number of topics that was extracted.

Website name	No. of articles	Word count	No. of topics	Model coherence
DNR24	2606	570119	15	0.5249
DONi News agency	1276	413355	16	0.5290
Lugansk1 Info	8668	1828824	19	0.4368
Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr	30717	7553627	30	0.4328
Total	**43267**	**10365925**	**80**	
Median	5637	1199471.5	17.5	0.4809
Average	10816.75	2591481.25	20	0.4809

Table 20: Corpus overview

[10] Alya Shandra, "'DNR's' propaganda Apparatus Exposed. Part 1: 'Russophobe, Get Him out of Donetsk,'" *Www.euromaidanpress.com*, May 8, 2016, http://euromaidanpress.com/2016/08/05/hack-reveals-how-dnr-denied-accreditation-to-disloyal-journalists/.

[11] DONi News, "Donetsk International Press Center," http://www.dnipress.com/, 2018, http://www.dnipress.com/.

[12] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr - Main Page," www.lug-info.com, 2019, http://lug-info.com/.

[13] DNR24, "Otkaz Ot Otvetstvennosti," www.dnr24.com, 2016, https://dnr24.com/disclaimer.html.

[14] Lugansk1 Info, "Lugansk1.Info - Main Page," www.lugansk1.info, 2019, http://lugansk1.info/.

5.3 Results & discussion

The topic models constructed from the outlets in this chapter reveal six themes and three distinct narratives present in content published on DNR and LNR news sites: "business as usual", "the cost of the war" and "shaming the enemy". While these may initially seem similar to the narratives identified in the previous chapter, there are important differences, which I will discuss below. Figure 14 gives an overview of how I arrived at these three narratives.
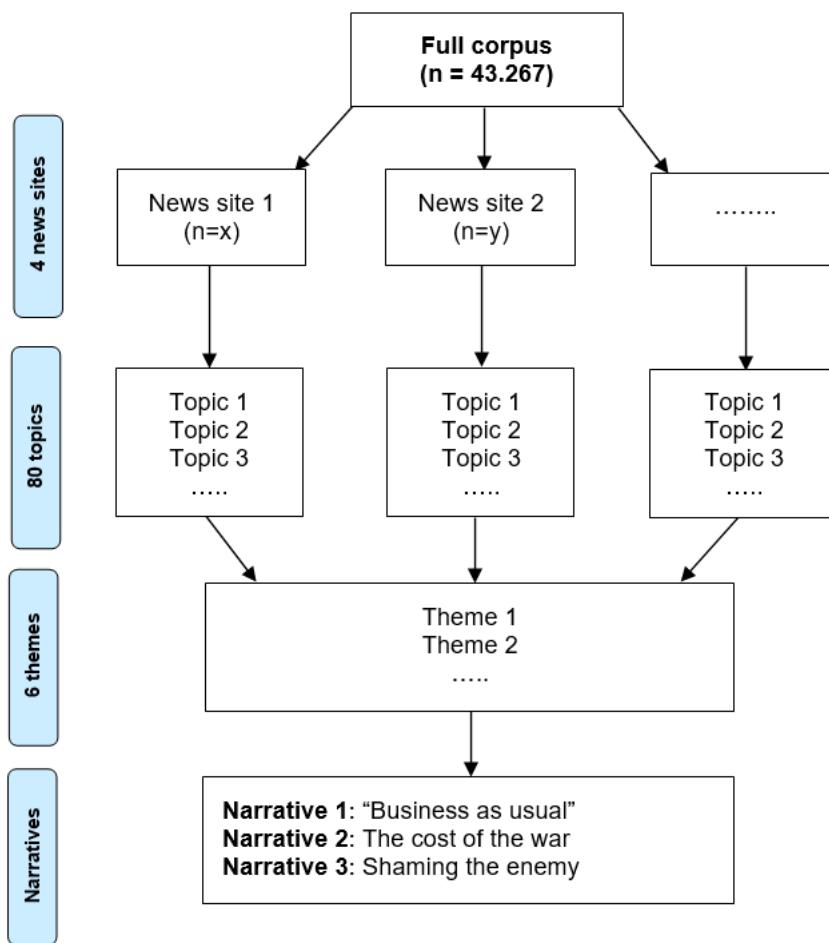

Figure 14: Flow diagram of narrative construction in DNR and LNR news sites

5.3.1 "Business as usual"

I will first discuss themes that are not (or barely) invested with explicit identity discourse. Firstly, issues that are relevant locally and not outside of the DNR and LNR are missing from the topic tables; topics relating to crime, home & garden and food are absent, and topics about education, cultural activities, the weather and sports are rare. Table 21 on the next page gives an overview of the 10 topics (out of 80 in total; 12.5%) that relate to day-to-day issues, a frequency that stands in contrast with the previous chapter, where "business as usual" topics constituted the majority in the corpus.

9 out of 30 topics in the *Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr* fit into this "business as usual" category. In its role as a press agency, *Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr* did not publish daily reports about local affairs, unlike DNR and LNR newspapers. Instead, when it published material about locally relevant topics, the articles had some level of relevance beyond the DNR/LNR borders. For example, the press agency did not report on the results of competition football matches, but it did comment on "international" matchups, when, for example, the LNR football team played against Abkhaziia for the first time in 2015[15]. Weather reports were published mostly when weather conditions were somewhat exceptional, for example when a new year's celebration was cancelled due to harsh winter weather[16]. Articles about children or education often related directly to the authorities, e.g. when the LNR authorities proposed modelling the school curriculum after the Russian Federation's[17] or when Igor Plotnitskii went on a trip to Moscow with a few high-performing high school students[18]. With regards to cultural activities, dispatches such as one about the opening of a new cinema[19] were par for the course. In addition, the press agency published near-daily articles explaining what types of activities (film screenings, theatre performances, festivals and concerts) were organised throughout the region on a given day[20].

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[15] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Futbolisty LNR Sygrali Pervyi Mezhdunarodnyi Match," *Www.lug-Info.com*, March 19, 2015, http://lug-info.com/news/one/futbolisty-lnr-sygrali-pervyi-mezhdunarodnyi-match-2122.
[16] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Pogoda Ne Isportit Luganchanam Novogodnie Prazdniki," *Www.lug-Info.com*, December 30, 2014, http://lug-info.com/news/one/pogoda-ne-isportit-luganchanam-novogodnie-prazdniki-771.
[17] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Ministerstvo Obrazovaniia LNR Gotovo K Perekhodu Na Obuchenie Shkol'nikov Po Rossiiskim Programmam," *Www.lug-Info.com*, November 18, 2014, http://lug-info.com/news/one/pogoda-ne-isportit-luganchanam-novogodnie-prazdniki-771.
[18] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Luchshie Shkol'niki Respubliki Pobyvali v Stolnitse Rossii," *Www.lug-Info.com*, August 2, 2016, http://lug-info.com/news/one/luchshie-shkolniki-respubliki-pobyvali-v-stolitse-rossii-15806.
[19] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Zhiteli Luganska v Techenie Leta Smogut Besplatno Poseshchat' Letnii Kinoteatr v Kvartale Iuzhnyi," *Www.lug-Info.com*, June 11, 2015, http://lug-info.com/news/one/zhiteli-luganska-v-techenie-leta-smogut-besplatno-poseschat-letnii-kinoteatr-na-kvartale-yuzhnyi-3866.
[20] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Luganskaia Afisha," *Www.lug-Info.com*, February 15, 2017, http://lug-info.com/news/one/luganskaya-afisha-21533.

Website & topic no.	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8	Term 9	Term 10
LuganskInfo-14	children (det-)	school (shkol-)	Luhansk	contest (konkurs)	children's (detsk-)	culture (kultur-)	year (god)	art (iskusstv-)	education (obrazovan-)	training (uchebn-)
LugInfoTsentr-03	degrees (gradus-)	temperature (temperatur-)	night (noch-)	air (vozdukh)	by day (dnem)	warm (tepl-)	zero (nul-)	high (vysh-)	weather forecast (TsGM)	forecaster (prognozir-)
LugInfoTsentr-10	hall (zal)	cartoon (multfilm)	address (adres)	telephone (telefon)	rubel (rubl-)	sitting (seans-)	blue (sin-)	cost (stoimost-)	inquiries (spravok)	Luhansk
LugInfoTsentr-11	wind (vetr-)	strengthening (usilen-)	storm (groz-)	object (predmet)	exit (vykhod)	Ministry of Emergency Sit. (MChS)	forecast (ozhida-)	hydrometeorologist (gidrometeorolog)	street (ulits-)	weather forecast (TsGM)
LugInfoTsentr-18	children (det-)	camp (lager-)	children's (detsk-)	child (rebenk-)	family (sem-)	gift (podark-)	parents (roditel-)	new year's (adj.) (novogodn-)	invalid (invalid-)	institution (uchrezhden-)
LugInfoTsentr-20	team (komand-)	competition (sorevnovan-)	sports (sport-)	tournament (turnir)	sports (adj.) (sportivn-)	place (mest-)	victor (pobeditel-)	youth (molodezh-)	Wednesday (sred-)	participation (uchast-)
LugInfoTsentr-21	festival (festival-)	contest (konkurs)	culture (kultur-)	art (iskusstv-)	theatre (teatr)	Luhansk	concert (kontsert)	creative (tvorchesk-)	artist (artist)	academy (akadem-)
LugInfoTsentr-22	your (pl.) (vash-)	holiday (prazdnik)	our (nash-)	health (zdorov-)	professional (adj.) (professional'n-)	labour (trud-)	worker (rabotnik)	wish (zhela-)	life (zhizn-)	republic (respublik-)
LugInfoTsentr-28	school (shkol-)	education (obrazovan-)	training (uchebn-)	university (universitet)	higher education (vuz-)	science (nauk-)	institution (uchrezhden-)	student (student)	establishment (zaveden-)	teach (ucha-)
LugInfoTsentr-29	visibly (vidim-)	mist (tuma-)	hydrometeorologist (gidrometeorolog)	change (men-)	centre (tsentr)	forecast (ozhida-)	morning (utr-)	night (noch-)	place (mest-)	weather forecaster (sinoptik)

Table 21: "Business as usual" topics (weather, culture, education & children, holidays)

Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr functioned as a provider of locally relevant news to local as well as non-local audiences. The other news sites in the corpus, however, hardly featured any articles about such topics. *Lugansk1 Info* has one topic related to children, education and culture; but, as with *Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr*, these reports usually carried some relevance outside of the DNR/LNR. One article from 2017, for instance, was about the Luhansk Philharmonic Orchestra participating in an international organ music festival in Sochi in the Russian Federation[21]. No topics related to these issues appeared in the two other corpora (*DONi News* and *DNR24*).

Similarly, as established in the previous chapter, the economy of the DNR and LNR was a salient point of discussion in DNR and LNR newspapers. The same is true for news websites; table 22 on the next page shows an overview of topics that relate to the local economy.

Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr has 6 topics related to issues like pension payments (16), trade unions (19), coal mining (23), the coal mining industry (23) and trade (30). Articles about such topics tend to involve policy decisions, such as deciding how to improve facilities for disabled people[22] or parliamentary discussions about tax reform[23].

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[21] Lugansk1 Info, "Artisty Luganskoi Filarmonii Vystupili Na Mezhdunarodnom Festivale v Sochi," *www.lugansk1.info*, September 26, 2017, http://lugansk1.info/39929-artisty-luganskoj-filarmonii-vystupili-na-mezhdunarodnom-festivale-v-sochi/.
[22] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "V Ministerste Sotsial'noi Politik Ikhotiat Vvesti Dolzhnost' Spetsialista Po Delam Invalidov," *Www.lug-Info.com*, November 26, 2014, http://lug-info.com/news/one/121.
[23] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Narodnyi Sovet Mozhet Priniat' 'nalogovye' popravki Uzhe Na Sleduiushchei Nedele - Drobot," *Www.lug-Info.com*, February 6, 2016, http://lug-info.com/news/one/narodnyi-sovet-mozhet-prinyat-nalogovye-popravki-uzhe-na-sleduyuschei-nedele-drobot-10502.

Website & topic no.	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8	Term 9	Term 10
DNR24-12	station (stants-)	filtration (adj.) (fil'troval'n-)	water (vod-)	Donetsk Filtration Station (dfs)	company (predpriiat-)	work (rabot-)	shelling (obstrel-)	Donetsk	Iasinovataia (iasinovat-)	company (kompan-)
DONi News-14	coal	suppli	gas	ton	water	plant	energi	blockad	million	enterpris
LuganskInfo-06	year (god)	Hryvnia (griv-)	thousand (tysiach-)	price (tsen-)	company (predpriiat-)	Ukraine (ukrain-)	million (million)	tonne (ton-)	gas (gaz)	dollar (dollar)
LuganskInfo-13	water (vod-)	station (stants-)	company (predpriiat-)	under control (podkontrol'n-)	territory (territor-)	work (rabot-)	area (raion)	side (storon-)	object (ob'ekt)	situation (situats-)
LugInfoTsentr-04	rubel (rubl-)	euro (evr-)	dollar (dollar)	USA (SShA)	Hryvnia (griv-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	Hryvnia (griv-)	bank (bank)	exchange rate (kurs)	track (sled)
LugInfoTsentr-12	water (vod-)	supply (podach-)	Luhansk Water (Luganskvod-)	water supply (vodosnabzhen-)	station (stants-)	Petrovsk	territory (territor-)	state unitary enterprise (gup)	day (sutk-)	under control (podkontrol'n-)
LugInfoTsentr-16	payment (vyplat-)	pensions (pens-)	pension (pension-)	fund (fond)	allowance (posob-)	branch (otdelen-)	social (sotsial'n-)	pensions (pens-)пюнеюр	bank (bank)	LNR
LugInfoTsentr-19	trade union (profsoiuz)	federation (federats-)	Akimov (akim-)	trade union (adj.) (profsoiuzn-)	chairperson (predsedatel-)	organisation (organizats-)	LNR	worker (rabotnik)	russian (rossiisk-)	Oleg
LugInfoTsentr-23	company (predpriiat-)	industry (promyshlen-)	production (produkts-)	factory (zavod)	work (rabot-)	year (god)	coal (adj.) (ugol'n-)	director (direktor)	coal mine (shakht-)	manufacturing (proizvodstv-)
LugInfoTsentr-30	price (tsen-)	goods (tovar-)	rubel (rub-)	trade (torgovl-)	cost (stoimost-)	rubel (rubl-)	production (produkts-)	wares (izdel-)	fuel (adj.) (topliv-)	services (uslug-)

Table 22: Topics related to local economy

The three other outlets in the corpus mentioned the economy primarily within the context of water filtration and the coal and gas industry (see topics DNR24-12; DONi News-14; Lugansk1Info-13 in table 22). Unlike in local newspapers, however, discussions about the local economy were related primarily to the war and to the stabilisation of the two regions. Reports about how the DNR and LNR authorities planned to the region economically were common, particularly in *DONi News*[24]:

> Due to the stabilisation of the situation in the Republic, almost all the enterprises were able to profit in the current year. The (*sic*) heavy industry is also being developed. For example, Yasinovatskiy (*sic*) machine-building plant is returning to the Russian market. Now the plant has received an order from one of the enterprises from Ural to produce coal combines KSP-35.[25]

In other cases, the toll taken by the war on local infrastructure, and by extension the economy, was a common object of discussion:

> Today at 4:45am, the Donetsk water filtration plant was left without power. The water supply of Avdeevka (temporarily under the control of the Armed Forces of Ukraine), and partially that of Donetsk and Iasinovataia, the villages of Verkhnetoretskoe, Vasilievka, Krasnyi Partizan and Krutaia Balka, was shut off, according to Donbas Water.[26]

In *DNR24, DONi News* and *Lugansk1 Info*, the economy was discussed primarily within the context of the war to emphasise self-sufficiency; the DNR and LNR were cast as the victims of an economic blockade and a lack of official recognition[27], which made exporting products more difficult. Ukraine is represented in this material as a power that is squeezing DNR and LNR residents by not allowing trade to flourish, and by forcing the DNR and LNR to export almost exclusively to Russia[28]. This narrative

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[24] This chapter will cite verbatim numerous articles published in *DONi News*, leaving intact some grammatical errors in the original publication as well as the original transliteration. Where necessary, I will offer additional contextual information.
[25] DONi News, "In the Midst of Conflict: Donetsk Defence Ministry Drew Attention to Peaceful Life in Free Donbass - DPR SitRep 30.10.," *Www.dnipress.com*, October 30, 2015, https://dnipress.com/en/posts/in-the-midst-of-conflict-donetsk-defence-ministry-drew-attention-to-peaceful-life-in-free-donbass/%0A.
[26] DNR24, "Donetskaia Fil'troval'naia Stantsiia Posle Dvukh Dnei Raboty Vnov' Obestochena," *www.dnr24.com*, December 7, 2016, https://dnr24.com/main/25853-doneckaya-filtrovalnaya-stanciya-posle-dvuh-dney-raboty-vnov-obestochena.html.
[27] DNR24, "'Aidar' i 'Donbass' prigrozili Nachat' Blokadu DNR I LNR.," *www.dnr24.com*, December 16, 2016, https://dnr24.com/main/25975-aydar-i-donbass-prigrozili-nachat-blokadu-dnr-i-lnr.html.
[28] Lugansk1 Info, "S Nachala 2015 Goda Lutuginskii Zavod Prokatnykh Valkov Realizoval Produktsii Na 180 Mln Rublei," *www.lugansk1.info*, December 21, 2015, http://lugansk1.info/2234-2234/.

stands in contrast with narratives present in newspaper content (see chapter 4): DNR and LNR newspapers discussed the economy not only in the context of the war, but also (to an extent) in the context of memory and identity. Coal mining and metallurgy, for example, were portrayed as sources of pride and identity as well as sources of income[29]. On DNR/LNR news sites, however, coal mining was primarily brought up within a technical context, with articles recounting the productivity of a mine or the effects of the war on production outputs[30]. Articles about heavy industry and mining were much less present online than in newspapers, although not entirely absent: occasionally, articles did refer to the identity-building function of the mining industry, particularly around the time of the Day of the Miner (August 27):

> 'Mir Luganshchine' invites residents of the Republic to take part in the Internet flash mob 'The Earth Submits to Them' (Im Pokoriaetsia Zemlia[31]), dedicated to the Day of the Miner (den' shakhtera). 'Traditionally, the Day of the Miner is celebrated in our region in a big way. We believe that the fate of every citizen of Luhansk is in one way or another connected with the coal mining industry […].'[32]

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[29] Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870s-1990s.*; Kuromiya, "The Donbas - The Last Frontier of Europe?"

[30] DNR24, "Uchenye DNR Pridumali, Kak Prodlit' Srok Sluzhby Makeevskoi shakhte 'Kholodnaia Balka' na 30 Let," *www.dnr24.com*, December 10, 2016, https://dnr24.com/main/25890-uchenye-dnr-pridumali-kak-prodlit-srok-sluzhby-makeevskoy-shahte-holodnaya-balka-na-30-let.html.

[31] The name of this event is a reference to *Im Pokoriaetsia Nebo*, a 1963 Soviet film by Tat'iana Leznova about the creation of the first Soviet jet fighter, the MiG-9.

[32] *Www.lug-Info.com*, August 23, 2017, http://lug-info.com/news/one/mir-luganschine-k-dnyu-shakhtera-provodit-internet-fleshmob-im-pokoryaetsya-zemlya-27587.; Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "'Mir Luganshchine' k Dniu Shakhtera Provodit Internet-fleshmob 'Im Pokoriaetsia Zemlia,'" *Www.lug-Info.com*, August 23, 2017, http://lug-info.com/news/one/mir-luganschine-k-dnyu-shakhtera-provodit-internet-fleshmob-im-pokoryaetsya-zemlya-27587.

Another "typical" topic of discussion is politics. Table 23 on the next page shows the topics in the corpus that relate to politics, both international (topics DONi News-06, -10; Lugansk1Info-12; -15) and domestic (topics DNR24-15; DONi News-08, -16; Lugansk1Info-02, -04; Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr-06, -19, -24, -25).

Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr has no topics relating to foreign policy or international politics, and instead focused heavily on domestic issues (e.g. topics 19, "trade unions" and 24, "elections"). I will examine topic 6 in more detail here. It relates to "Mir Luganshchine" ("Peace for Luhansk region"), Plotnitskii's social movement/political party. Between 2014 and 2017, it held the majority of seats in the LNR "People's Council". Its remit was wider than that of most political parties. Its activities included conducting "youth diplomacy"[33] (for example organising educational trips abroad for high school students[34]); running projects such as "we will not forgive, we will not forget!" (ne zabudem, ne prostim!)[35] and "Volunteer" (volunter)[36], which focused on either humanitarian aid or military recruitment; setting up a "hotline" to report cases of corruption[37]; and organising "patriotic" public events such as "Brianka sings with the heart!" (Brianka poet serdtsem!)[38], "one thousand days of resistance" (1.000 dnei vopreki)[39] and "Victory is ours!" (pobeda za nami!)[40].

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[33] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Molodezhnaia Diplomatiia v LNR Uzhe Rabotaet - Aktivist," *Www.lug-Info.com*, September 3, 2015, http://lug-info.com/news/one/molodezhnaya-diplomatiya-v-lnr-uzhe-rabotaet-aktivist-6339.
[34] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Talantlivye Deti Respubliki Vernulis' Iz Poezdki v Moskvu," *Www.lug-Info.com*, September 21, 2015, http://lug-info.com/news/one/talantlivye-deti-respubliki-vernulis-iz-poezdki-v-moskvu-6868.
[35] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Radioperedachi Proekta 'ne Zabudem, Ne Prostim!' pomogaiut Zhiteliam LNR Otstaivat' Ikh Prava," *Www.lug-Info.com*, April 7, 2016, http://lug-info.com/news/one/radioperedachi-proekta-ne-zabudem-ne-prostim-pomogayut-zhitelyam-lnr-otstaivat-ikh-prava-12346.
[36] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Shkola Sverdlovska Poluchila Shefskuiu Pomoshch' Ot Blagotvoritel'nogo Fonda Iz Ekaterinburga," *Www.lug-Info.com*, January 20, 2016, http://lug-info.com/news/one/shkola-sverdlovska-poluchila-shefskuyu-pomosch-ot-blagotvoritelnogo-fonda-iz-ekaterinburga-9992.
[37] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "'Mir Luganschine' budet Reagirovat' Na vse Fakty Korruptsii, Postupaiushchie Ot Zhitelei - Glava LNR," *Www.lug-Info.com*, November 23, 2015, http://lug-info.com/news/one/mir-luganschine-budet-reagirovat-na-vse-fakty-korruptsii-postupayuschie-ot-zhitelei-glava-lnr-8517.
[38] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Zhiteli Brianki 'speli serdtsem' pesniu 'Den' Pobedy,'" *Www.lug-Info.com*, May 6, 2016, http://lug-info.com/news/one/zhiteli-bryanki-speli-serdtsem-pesnyu-den-pobedy-13312.
[39] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Fleshmob v Ramkakh Respublikanskoi aktsii '1000 Dnei Vopreki' sostoialsia v Krasnoluchskoi Novopavlovke (FOTO)," *Www.lug-Info.com*, January 9, 2017, http://lug-info.com/news/one/fleshmob-v-ramkakh-respublikanskoi-aktsii-1000-dnei-vopreki-sostoyalsya-v-krasnoluchskoi-novopavlovke-foto-20524.
[40] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Narodnyi forum 'Pobeda Za Nami!' sostoitsia v Luganske Na stadione 'Avangard' 10 Oktiabria," *Www.lug-Info.com*, October 9, 2015, http://lug-info.com/news/one/forum-pobeda-za-nami-sostoitsya-v-luganske-na-stadione-avangard-10-oktyabrya-7497.

Website & Topic no.	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8	Term 9	Term 10
DNR24-15	service (sluzhb-)	press (press-)	explosion (vzryv)	Ministry of Emergency Sit. (MChS)	DNR	Donetsk	republic (respublik-)	ministry (ministerstv-)	place (mest-)	employee (sotrudnik)
DONi News-06	crimea	return	russia	ukrain	status	recogn	politician	integr	march	coup
DONi News-08	republ	zakharchenko	dpr	head	donetsk	peopl	alexand	passport	citizen	donbass
DONi News-10	russian	russia	feder	putin	committe	moscow	vladimir	sanction	syria	humanitarian
DONi News-16	elect	vote	primari	observ	held	countri	commiss	particip	process	intern
Lugansk1Info-02	republic (respublik-)	LNR	people's (narodn-)	Luhansk	minister (ministr)	council (sovet)	ministry (ministerstv-)	head (glav-)	state (adj.) (gosudarstvenn-)	Plotnitskii (plotnitsk-)
Lugansk1Info-04	Interior Ministry (mvd)	LNR	employee (sotrudnik)	citizen (grazhdanin)	societal (obshchestven-)	centre (tsentr)	communications (sviaz-)	check (proverk-)	crime (prestuplen-)	search (rozysk-)
Lugansk1Info-12	USA (SShA)	Russia (ross-)	Ukraine (ukrain-)	russian (rossiisk-)	American (amerikansk-)	Trump (tramp)	sanctions (sankts-)	president (prezident)	Washington (vashington)	relations (otnoshen-)
Lugansk1Info-15	law (zakon)	language (iazyk)	MP (deputat)	Rada (rad-)	Ukraine (ukrain-)	right (prav-)	bill (zakonoproekt)	Verkhovna (verkhovn-)	education (obrazovan-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)
LugInfoTsentr-06	peace (mir)	Luhansk region (luganshchin-)	movement (dvizhen-)	project (proekt)	societal (obshchestven-)	elections (vybor-)	chairperson (predsedatel-)	condition (sostoian-)	youth (molodezh-)	organisation (organizats-)
LugInfoTsentr-19	trade union (profsoiuz)	federation (federats-)	Akimov (akim-)	trade union (adj.) (profsoiuzn-)	chairperson (predsedatel-)	organisation (organizats-)	LNR	worker (rabotnik)	russian (rossiisk-)	Oleg
LugInfoTsentr-24	voting (golosovan-)	elections (vybor-)	preliminary (predvaritel'n-)	candidate (kandidat)	carrying out (proveden-)	electoral (izbiratel'n-)	societal (obshchestven-)	local (mestn-)	assembly (sobran-)	commission (komiss-)
LugInfoTsentr-25	law (zakon)	state (adj.) (gosudarstvenn-)	council (sovet)	people's (narodn-)	taxes (nalog-)	tax (adj.) (nalogov-)	LNR	committee (komitet)	republic (respublik-)	MP (deputat)

Table 23: Topics related to politics

Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, being the main press vehicle for the LNR authorities, paid a great deal of attention to "Mir Luganshchine's" various activities. In such coverage we discern some level of ingroup identity discourse, for example in the following report about a competition for high school students entitled "Unknown and Known Donbas"[41], organised by "Mir Luganshchine" in the town of Krasnyi Luch:

> According to [Marina Vasilenko, head of the Department of Information and Domestic Affairs of the city administration of Krasnyi Luch], the main objectives of the competition were to attract the attention of children and young people to the history and culture of their native land, to develop the creative abilities and skills of children and young people, and to foster a sense of patriotism, respect and a caring attitude towards the multinational culture of their small homeland (malaia rodina).[42]

Another example is the announcement of a "subbotnik" (a day during which people sign up to do voluntary work, usually on some kind of public project), organised by "Mir Luganshchine":

> [Mir Luganshchine] invites all residents of the LPR (*sic*) to take part in a Republic-wide cleanup on April 28, 2017, under the motto "Order in the Republic is peace at home", […] 'We [Mir Luganshchine], as the largest social movement in the Republic, with more than 87 thousand people in our ranks […] invite all concerned citizens (neravnodushnykh zhitelei) to take active part in [this subbotnik]. Together, with combined effort, let's make the territory of our collective home - our Republic – beautiful', said Nikolai Zaporozhtsev, acting Head of the Republican Executive Committee of Mir Luganshchine. 'As part of the subbotnik, trees will be planted in cities and districts of the LNR as a symbol of peace and new life, in which there is no place for war in our land,' he added.[43]

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[41] In original: неизвестный – известный Донбасс

[42] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Organizatory Podveli Itogi konkursa 'Neizvestnyi - Izvestnyi Donbass' v Krasnom Luche," *Www.lug-Info.com*, February 19, 2016, http://lug-info.com/news/one/organizatory-podveli-itogi-konkursa-neizvestnyi-izvestnyi-donbass-v-krasnom-luche-10936.

[43] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "'Mir Luganshchine' priglashaet Zhitelei LNR 28 Aprelia Priniat' Uchastie v Respublikanskom Subbotnike," *Www.lug-Info.com*, April 24, 2017, http://lug-info.com/news/one/mir-luganschine-priglashaet-zhitelei-28-aprelya-prinyat-uchastie-v-respublikanskom-subbotnike-23755.

In both articles, "Mir Luganshchine" representatives referred to patriotism and the idea of a homeland for LNR citizens. But while the events themselves may have been patriotic in nature, the rhetoric used to describe them was devoid of specificity; patriotism and love for the homeland were asserted but rarely explained in detail. Unlike in DNR and LNR newspapers, *Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr*'s online material rarely explored local identity beyond the realm of banal descriptions and assertions.

This practice holds for the other news sites in the corpus to an even greater extent, as internal politics received even less attention here. Articles about domestic politics originated from press centres and were then copied or adapted by other news sites. *Lugansk1 Info*, for example, relied on *Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr* as a source for its articles about locally relevant political issues like fixing Luhansk's water supply[44], speeches and public appearances by state officials[45], political and parliamentary reforms[46], and local cultural events and entertainment[47]. But while *Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr*'s corpus, as mentioned above, is replete with articles about local affairs, the majority of its reports copied or used as a source by *Lugansk1 Info* (and even in some cases *DNR24*[48] and *DONi News*[49]) were, once again, to do with the conflict; examples include the discovery of alleged Ukrainian spies[50], ongoing discussions within the framework of the Minsk agreements[51], and an interview with a local activist group leader about Kyiv's "terror attacks" against the LNR[52].

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[44] Lugansk1 Info, "Vostochnye Raiony Luganska Budut Poluchat' Vodu v Techenie Vsego Dnia - Sergei Ivanushkin," *www.lugansk1.info*, July 31, 2017, http://lugansk1.info/36632-vostochnye-rajony-luganska-budut-poluchat-vodu-v-techenie-vsego-dnya-sergej-ivanushkin/.
[45] Lugansk1 Info, "Ukraina Stal Iarkim Primerom Degradatsii Instituta Gosudarstvennosti - Plotnitskii," *www.lugansk1.info*, May 18, 2017, http://lugansk1.info/31989-ukraina-stala-yarkim-primerom-degradatsii-instituta-gosudarstvennosti-plotnitskij/.
[46] Lugansk1 Info, "Plotnitskii Anonsiroval Sokrashchenie Chisla Ministerstv I Perestanovki v Rukovodstve Regionov," *www.lugansk1.info*, April 11, 2016, http://lugansk1.info/18525-plotnitskij-anonsiroval-sokrashhenie-chisla-ministerstv-i-perestanovki-v-rukovodstve-regionov/.
[47] Lugansk1 Info, "Bolee 500 Knig Peredali v Detskii Priiut I Dom Prestarelykh Zhiteli Antratsita," *www.lugansk1.info*, April 11, 2016, http://lugansk1.info/18799-bolee-500-knig-peredali-v-detskij-priyut-i-dom-prestarelyh-zhiteli-antratsita/.
[48] DNR24, "V Donetske Predotvrashchen Terakt, Organizovannyi Ukrainskimi Spetssluzhbami - Komandovanie DNR," *www.dnr24.com*, July 4, 2017, https://dnr24.com/main/27681-v-donecke-predotvraschen-terakt-organizovannyy-ukrainskimi-specsluzhbami-komandovanie-dnr.html.
[49] DONi News, "Supported by NATO Kiev May Escalate the Conflict in Donbass," *Www.dnipress.com*, December 18, 2015, https://dnipress.com/en/posts/supported-by-nato-kiev-may-escalate-the-conflict-in-donbass/.
[50] Lugansk1 Info, "Politsiia Obnaruzhila Nedaleko Ot Tsentra Luganska Tainik Ukrainskikh Diversantov - Igor' Kornet," *www.lugansk1.info*, March 22, 2017, http://lugansk1.info/29614-politsiya-obnaruzhila-nedaleko-ot-tsentra-luganska-tajnik-ukrainskih-diversantov-igor-kornet/.
[51] Lugansk1 Info, "Uchastniki Kontaktnoi Gruppy Nachali Zasedanie v Minske," *www.lugansk1.info*, April 5, 2016, http://lugansk1.info/17065-uchastniki-kontaktnoj-gruppy-nachali-zasedanie-v-minske/.
[52] Lugansk1 Info, "Ustraivaia Terakty, Kiev Pokazyvaet Svoiu Negotovnost' K Mirnomu Dialogu S Donbassom - Aktivist," *www.lugansk1.info*, September 19, 2017, http://lugansk1.info/39440-ustraivaya-terakty-kiev-pokazyvaet-svoyu-negotovnost-k-mirnomu-dialogu-s-donbassom-aktivist/.

This point is indicative of a wider pattern that becomes visible when examining DNR/LNR internet media more closely: the discourse used to describe identity of these statelets existed as an anti-discourse – that is, it is defined by what it is not, rather than by what it is or wants to be. The term "Novorossiia" shows up from time to time in each corpus, but its role in DNR/LNR ideology or identity building was almost never explored. An example can be found in an interview with Natal'ia Nikonorova, then-minister of foreign affairs of the DNR, published in 2016. Nikonorova was asked about the future of Novorossiia as a political project and the possibilities of forming a federation with the LNR[53]:

Nikonorova: […] For now we are bringing our legal frameworks in line with each other. But we're hoping for more, that is, if it is to be a federation, then with a much larger list of subjects. The idea of Novorossiia is good, but ...

Interviewer: But you still need a piece of the Rostov region?

N: No, we won't be going in that direction.

I: So do you expect that Kharkiv or other eastern regions of Ukraine will join you?

N: That would be nice.

I: And with whom is it better to unite, with Kharkiv or Rostov?

N: Everything will depend on the outcome of the Minsk process. If Kyiv fulfills its obligations, which I strongly doubt, it will be a completely different Ukraine.

Nikonorova weighed the pros and cons of "Novorossiia" as a political project, as opposed to an ideological mission. The term thus serves as a reference to an ideology without content. Articles delving into, for example, the relevance of "Novorossiia" for the culture, history or identity of Donbas or the DNR/LNR were almost non-existent[54].

The idea of Russian-ness and the "Russian World" received scant attention across all corpora. Articles considering linkages between the DNR and LNR and the larger Russian space in some detail were rare. One article, for example, featured an opinion writer arguing that Donbas residents, suffering from a lack of culture and meaning, are

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[53] Lugansk1 Info, "Ukraina Ob'iasniaet tormozhenie 'Minska-2" otsutstviem Bezopasnosti Na Donbasse - Ministr MID DNDR," *www.lugansk1.info*, April 18, 2016, http://lugansk1.info/21105-ukraina-obyasnyaet-tormozhenie-minska-2-otsutstviem-bezopasnosti-na-donbasse-ministr-mid-dnr/.

[54] One example of an article that does do this is the following: Lugansk1 Info, "Novorossiia Ot Luganska Do Odessy Eshche Ne Proigrana," *www.lugansk1.info*, April 13, 2016, http://lugansk1.info/19486-novorossiya-ot-luganska-do-odessy-eshhyo-ne-proigrana/.

looking for a "happy Russian life"[55]. Elena Zaslavskaia, a well-known poet from Luhansk, reflected on the effects of the war on her sense of identity in an interview:

> Although my house was not completely destroyed, it did suffer during the shelling of the city. But I gained much more than I lost. I witnessed how my people resisted injustice and rose up to fight, for their language, for their traditions, for their heroes. The words 'Motherland' (rodina), 'Donbas character' (donbasskii kharakter), 'Russian world' (russkii mir), which used to be empty agitprop slogans, suddenly became full of meaning.[56]

While Zaslavskaia did not elaborate further than this, her interview is a rare example of a clear invocation of ingroup identity as an object of identity building. As evident from tables 21 through 24 above, only one topic can be seen as more or less directly related to ingroup identity: namely, language and language policy (Lugansk1 Info-15; see table 24). All other topics discussed in this chapter, as well as the themes that comprise them, pertain to outgroup, rather than ingroup identity.

Thus, while on the surface internal politics were a common topic on DNR and LNR news sites, political discussions were almost entirely devoid of ingroup-focused discourse. Where this discourse did exist (mostly in articles published by *Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr*), ingroup identity was asserted as existing a-priori, rather than explored and explained in detail. Instead, news site discourse focused primarily on the conflict, and more specifically Ukraine's role in it.

Unlike newspapers, then, news sites in the DNR and LNR framed relevant issues not from a local but from a more international perspective. Topics like sports, the economy, culture, arts, education and local history were less relevant online than in print and relatively devoid of references to community and local identity. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that the inward-focused identity discourse relating to these day-to-day topics was present but impoverished. Online, such discourse was absent altogether. In the next section, I explore what has replaced it.

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[55] Lugansk1 Info, "Beglaia Moshennitsa Iz Sverdlovska Rassazyvaet Nebylitsy O Respublike (VIDEO)," *www.lugansk1.info*, January 17, 2016, http://lugansk1.info/5279-russkoj-schastlivoj-zhizni-iskali-v-malokulturnyh-gorodah-donbassa-zhurnalist/.
[56] Vitalii Darenskii, "Elena Zaslavskaia: Poeziia Novogo Mira," *www.lugansk1.info*, February 5, 2016, http://lugansk1.info/7394-elena-zaslavskaya-poeziya-novogo-mira/.

5.3.2 The cost of the war

The Donbas war played an outsize role in DNR/LNR online news discourse. Table 24 on the next page shows the topics in each corpus related to the war. A full 33 out of 80 topics across all 4 corpora pertain to this theme (and 27 out of 50 if the *Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr* corpus is not taken into account): 9 out of 15 topics in *DNR24*, 9 out of 16 topics in *DONi News*, 10 out of 19 topics in *Lugansk1Info*, and 5 out of 30 topics in *Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr*. More specifically, topics relate to a number of sub-themes, including the material cost of the war such as the destruction of infrastructure and houses (topics DNR24-02, -04; DONi News-04, -05, -12; Lugansk1 Info-16, -18), civilian casualties (topics DNR24-11; DONi News-15), military engagements including combat operations (DNR24-02, -05, -08, -10; DONi News-01, -06, -11; Lugansk1 Info-03, -08, -17; Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr-17), and peace negotiations and conflict resolution (topics DNR24-14; DONi News-07; Lugansk1 Info-05; Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr-01, -05). Only *Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr* has a topic about World War II (topic no. 08).

Website & topic no.	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8	Term 9	Term 10
DNR24-01	violation (narush-)	regime (rezh-)	fire (ogn-)	day (sutk-)	cease (prekrashchen-)	command (komandovan-)	past (proshedsh-)	apc (btr)	point (punkt)	grenade launcher (granatomet)
DNR24-02	battle (bo-)	mortar (minomet)	Strelkov	nuclear weapons (laBP)	announcement (soobshchen-)	area (raion)	mortar- (minometn-)	Donetsk	north (sever)	Gorlovka
DNR24-04	house (dom)	damage (povrezhd-)	street (ulits-)	shelling (obstrel-)	result (rezul'tat)	residential (zhil-)	administration (administrats-)	village (poselk-)	head (glav-)	strike (popadan-)
DNR24-05	Basurin	soldier (voennosluzha-)	Eduard	DNR	command (komandovan-)	command (komand-)	deputy (zamestitel-)	died (pogib-)	operative (operativn-)	republic (respublik-)
DNR24-08	line (lin-)	contact (soprikosnoven-)	intelligence (razvedk-)	Ukrainian army (vsu)	howitzer (gaubitz-)	front	direction (napravlen-)	area (raion)	Basurin	tank
DNR24-09	Jacob (iakub)	JCCC (STsKKK)	joint (sovmestn-)	coordination (koordinats-)	ammunition (voepripas-)	regime (rezhim)	centre (tsentr)	control (kontrol-)	Ruslan (rusla-)	representation (predstavitelstv-)
DNR24-10	mine (min-)	calibre (kalibr-)	shell (snariad-)	launch (vypust-)	Donetsk	artilery (adj.) (artilleriichesk-)	lasinovataia (lasinovat-)	tank (adj.) (tankov-)	Krutaia Balka (balk-)	village (poselk-)
DNR24-11	injured (ranen-)	receive (poluch-)	peaceful (mirn-)	shelling (obstrel-)	resident (zhitel-)	birthday (rozhden-)	result (rezul'tat)	woman (zhenshchin-)	injury (ran-)	man (muzhchin-)
DNR24-14	ceasefire (peremir-)	contact (adj.) (kontaktn-)	school (shkol'n-)	Donbas	group (grupp-)	Minsk	participant (uchastnik)	midnight (polunoch-)	august (avgust-)	he (on)
DONi News-01	command	local	militari	brigad	regist	afu	shell	line	contact	ukrainian
DONi News-03	militia	local	lpr	peopl	marochko	militari	afu	area	unit	andrey
DONi News-04	hous	shell	damag	local	district	night	street	result	residenti	hit
DONi News-05	settlement	contact	line	tank	record	away	basurin	propel	detect	vehicl
DONi News-07	osc	mission	smm	monitor	observ	repres	hug	special	arm	secur
DONi News-11	yashchenko	chief	deputi	corp	igor	militia	lpr	colonel	militari	villag
DONi News-12	shell	ukrainian	villag	dpr	command	mortar	forc	donetsk	calib	armi
DONi News-13	prison	exchang	visit	morozova	vladimir	dpr	pushilin	kiev	deleg	negoti
DONi News-15	wound	civilian	die	got	result	peopl	offic	soldier	ombudsman	week
Lugansk1Info-01	this (et-)	which (kotor-)	one's own (svo-)	people (liud-)	war (voin-)	self (sam-)	our (nash-)	Donbas	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	power (vlast-)
Lugansk1Info-03	soldier (voennosluzha-)	Ukrainian army (vsu)	militia (milits-)	brigade (brigad-)	Marochko	soldier (voen-)	people's (narodn-)	armed (vooruzhen-)	area (raion)	unit (podrazdelen-)
Lugansk1Info-05	Minsk	Donbas	agreemente (soglashen-)	contact (adj.) (kontaktn-)	group (grupp-)	regulation (uregolirovan-)	agree (dogovoren-)	fulfillment (vypolnen-)	negotiation (peregovor)	conflict (konflikt)
Lugansk1Info-07	Donetsk	DNR	agency (agenstv-)	shelling (obstrel-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	command (komandovan-)	news (novost-)	today (segodn-)	Ukrainian army (vsu)	Donetsk News Agency (DAN)
Lugansk1Info-08	mortar (minomet)	militia (milits-)	shelling (obstrel-)	source (istochnik)	people's (narodn-)	to shell (obstrelia-)	shooting (vystrel-)	Kyiv (adj.) (kievsk-)	village (sel-)	calibre (kalibr-)
Lugansk1Info-11	OSCE (obs-)	mission (miss-)	SMM (smm)	observer (nabliudatel-)	monitoring (monitoringov)	special (spetsial'n-)	UN (oon)	representative (predstavitel-)	side (storon-)	line (lin-)
Lugansk1Info-16	house (dom)	residential (zhil-)	fire (pozhar)	injured (postrada-)	street (ulits-)	result (rezul'tat)	Ministry of Emergency Sit. (MChS)	shelling (obstrel-)	resident (zhitel-)	woman (zhenshchin-)
Lugansk1Info-17	оруж	ammunition (boepripas-)	grenade (granat-)	cartridge (patron-)	calibre (kalibr-)	discover (obnaruzh-)	substance (veshchestv-)	seize (iz'iat-)	grenade launcher (granatomet)	unlawful (nezakon-)
Lugansk1Info-18	point (punkt)	miss (propusk-)	village (stanits-)	Luhansk	gold (zolot-)	population (naselen-)	side (storon-)	line (lin-)	bridge (most-)	resident (zhitel-)
LugInfoTsentr-01	Minsk	agreement (soglashen-)	complex (kompleks)	measures (mer-)	Donbas	weapons (orud-)	resolution (rezoliuts-)	UN (oon)	security officer (silovik)	contact (adj.) (kontaktn-)
LugInfoTsentr-05	group (grupp-)	Minsk	question (vopros)	contact (adj.) (kontaktn-)	subgroup (podgrupp-)	labourer (raboch-)	aspect (aspekt)	Deinego (dein-)	fulfilment (vypolnen-)	Ukraine (ukrain-)
LugInfoTsentr-08	war (voin-)	great (velik-)	victory (pobed-)	patriotic (otechestven-)	year (god)	demonstration (akts-)	our (nash-)	memory (pamia-)	Luhansk	casualty (pogibsh-)
LugInfoTsentr-09	militia (milits-)	people's (narodn-)	calibre (kalibr-)	security officer (silovik)	armed (vooruzhen-)	Minsk	village (sel-)	отвод	line (lin-)	shelling (obstrel-)
LugInfoTsentr-15	Interior Ministry (mvd)	collaborator (sotrudnik)	unlawful (nezakon-)	criminal (adj.) (ugolovn-)	case (del-)	weapon (oruzh-)	police (polits-)	seize (iz'iat-)	ammunition (boepripas-)	LNR
LugInfoTsentr-17	soldier (voennosluzha-)	Ukrainian army (vsu)	Marochko	militia (milits-)	brigade (brigad-)	subdivision (podrazdelen-)	anti-terror operation (at-)	Lieut. Col. (podpolkovnik)	to call (nazyva-)	Ukraine (ukrain-)

Table 24: Topics related to the conflict

Looking more closely at the terms that appear in the topic list within these sub-themes, it becomes clear that the framing in the three news sites in the corpus focused on the actions of the enemy. Terms such as "violation" (narushenie; topic DNR24-01), "unlawful" (nezakonnyi; topic Lugansk1 Info-17 and Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr-15) and "fulfilment" (vypolnenie; topic Lugansk1 Info-05; Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr-05) indicate an emphasis on the actor at fault for ceasefire violations and other military infractions. Articles detailing such alleged offences were common. *DNR-24* and *DONi News* would often cite Eduard Basurin, deputy chief of the Operational Command of the DNR, whose name also appears repeatedly in table 24 (topics DNR24-05, -08; DONI News-05). Typical reports, which are published multiple times per week, would list the military operations undertaken by the Ukrainian Anti-Terrorist Operation:

> Over the past month, Ukrainian armed forces personnel carried out 14 attacks in the direction of the positions of the Donetsk People's Republic. This was announced today at a briefing by the deputy commander of the operational command of the DNR, Eduard Basurin: 'In November 2016, the enemy carried out a total of 14 offensive strikes in the direction of our positions with the support of heavy artillery and armoured vehicles.'[57]

Basurin's press releases in *DONi News* typically mentioned both military engagements and Ukraine's alleged ceasefire allegations[58]:

> 'The situation in the Donetsk People's Republic has remained tense over the past day. There were two ceasefire violations by the Ukrainian war criminals', vice-commander of DPR army Eduard Basurin in Thursday (*sic*). 'Donetsk airport was shelled from the positions of the 93 separate motorized rifle brigade under the command of Colonel Vladislav Klochkov with mortars of 82 mm calibre. The mines № 6, 7 in Gorlovka were attacked from the town of Mayorsk

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[57] DNR24, "VSU Za Noiabr' Sovershili 14 Boevykh Vylazok Na Territoriiu DNR, Poteri Dostigli 25 Silovikov," *www.dnr24.com*, December 2, 2016, https://dnr24.com/main/25801-vsu-za-noyabr-sovershili-14-boevyh-vylazok-na-territoriyu-dnr-poteri-dostigli-25-silovikov.html.

[58] See also: DONi News, "Harsh Conditions in Ukrainian Occupied Territory in Front of Elections - DPR SitRep 18.10.," *Www.dnipress.com*, October 18, 2015, https://dnipress.com/en/posts/harsh-conditions-in-ukrainian-occupied-territory-in-front-of-elections-dpr-sitrep-18.10/%0A; and also DONi News, "Donetsk SitRep: JCCC and OSCE's Cynicism and Indifference amid Suffering and Deaths in Donbass – 12.03.," *Www.dnipress.com*, March 12, 2016, https://dnipress.com/en/posts/donetsk-sitrep-jccc-and-osces-cynicism-and-indifference-amid-suffering-and-deaths-in-donbass-12.03/.

with grenade machine guns.' The DPR's intelligence constantly confirms the Minsk agreements violations by the Ukrainian side concerning the withdrawal of heavy weapons over 100 mm from the contact line.[59]

In the LNR, the role of press officer was held by Andrei Marochko, variously addressed as a lieutenant-colonel, colonel and major, and whose name also appears in table 24 (DONi News-03; Lugansk1 Info-03; Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr-17). While Marochko regularly addressed the press to talk about a variety of topics related to the ongoing conflict, his main role, like Basurin's, was to provide details on military engagements, casualties and damage done to infrastructure and real estate. Typically, Marochko would also address the illegality of Ukraine's actions in light of the Minsk agreements:

'Over the past week, Ukrainian security forces violated the ceasefire 61 times. The attacks were carried out using all types of weaponry, including weapons prohibited by the Minsk agreements: 152mm artillery, 120- and 82mm mortars, infantry combat vehicles, various types of grenade launchers, and small arms and light weapons', said [Andrei] Marochko.[60]

In all four outlets, the Minsk agreements were mentioned primarily within the context of Ukraine's alleged violations of it:

[…] since the autumn of 2014, members of the Contact Group[61] have declared over ten times that agreements have been reached to observe a 'regime of silence[62]' in the region. Kyiv security forces have repeatedly violated the terms of the truce, including opening fire from large-caliber guns, mortars and tank guns, which were to be removed in accordance with the Minsk Agreements.[63]

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[59] DONi News, "Situation in Donetsk Remains Tense - DPR SitRep," *Www.dnipress.com*, October 15, 2015, https://dnipress.com/en/posts/situation-in-donetsk-remains-tense-dpr-sitrep-15.10.2015/%0A
[60] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "VSU Za Nedeliu Vypustili Po Territorii LNR Bolee 700 Boepripasov - Narodnaia Militsiia," *Www.lug-Info.com*, August 4, 2017, http://lug-info.com/news/one/vsu-za-nedelyu-vypustili-po-territorii-lnr-bolee-700-boepripasov-narodnaya-militsiya-27017.
[61] The Trilateral Contact Group, a group of representatives from Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE that is tasked with facilitating a diplomatic solution to the Donbas conflict.
[62] In original: Режим тишины
[63] Lugansk1 Info, "Za God Kievskimi Silovikami v LNR Razrusheno Okolo 70 Domostroenii I Ob"ektov Infrastruktury," *www.lugansk1.info*, December 29, 2017, http://lugansk1.info/44866-za-god-kievskimi-silovikami-v-lnr-razrusheno-okolo-70-domostroenij-i-obektov-infrastruktury/.

Prisoner exchanges between Ukraine and the DNR/LNR were overseen by the OCSE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) in the area[64]. Fighters returning from Ukrainian captivity were occasionally interviewed by journalists for *Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr*, after which these articles would be copied by other news sites. In such interviews, the fighters would often emphasise the bad treatment given to them by Ukrainian troops:

> Supporters of the Donbas republics, released yesterday […] from Ukrainian captivity, told a journalist for *Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr* about instances of torture in the Ukrainian security service and inhumane conditions in prisons. 'There was torture. They beat some kind of testimony out of us and then pinned entirely different charges on us. They tried to pin some homicide on me retroactively, but at that time I was already back in the DNR, and there was evidence for this', said a Donetsk resident who had returned home.[65]

Another common object of discussion is the morale of Ukrainian troops, which was framed as being low and declining due to bad working conditions and a lack of military accomplishments[66]. In many cases, low morale was reported to result in criminal behaviour:

> A soldier of the 54th Light Brigade[67] of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which is deployed in the zone of the so-called 'ATO', while intoxicated, shot more than 15 colleagues, seven of whom died on the spot, according to the official representative of the People's Militia of the LNR, Major Andrei Marochko. [Marochko] remarked that the rise in non-combat losses in the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine is due to the low morale and poor psychological state of army personnel.[68]

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[64] OSCE, "Latest from OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine Based on Information Received as of 19:30 (Kyiv Time), 10 July 2015," www.osce.org, 2015, https://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/171856.

[65] Lugansk1 Info, "Osvobozhdennye Iz Ukrainskogo Plena Storonniki Respublik Donbassa Rasskazali O Pytkakh SBU," *www.lugansk1.info*, December 28, 2017, http://lugansk1.info/44792-osvobozhdennye-iz-ukrainskogo-plena-storonniki-respublik-donbassa-rasskazali-o-pytkah-sbu/.

[66] DNR24, "Nizkii Moral'nyi Dukh Boitsov VSU Privel K Ocherednym Neboevym Poteriam," *www.dnr24.com*, June 13, 2017, https://dnr24.com/main/27554-nizkiy-moralnyy-duh-boycov-vsu-privel-k-ocherednym-neboevym-poteryam.html.

[67] In original: Механизированная бригада

[68] DNR24, "P'ianyi Boets VSU Rasstrelial Sosluzhivtsev V 'zone ATO', Semero Pogibli - Narodnaia Militsiia LNR," *www.dnr24.com*, January 17, 2017, http://lugansk1.info/26512-pyanyj-boets-vsu-rasstrelyal-sosluzhivtsev-v-zone-ato-semero-pogibli-narodnaya-militsiya-lnr/.

Efforts were made to claim rampant alcoholism and other forms of irregular behaviour on the part of the Ukrainian troops[69]. The military accomplishments by DNR and LNR troops, by contrast, were covered less prominently than the unlawful behaviour by the Ukrainian army: indeed, there are surprisingly few articles about DNR/LNR soldiers' feats of bravery or military victories. The article cited below is an exception:

> The People's Militia organised a 'Lesson in courage[70]' for the youth of the Luhansk People's Republic at the Luhansk airport, which was liberated by the militia a year ago. [...] A veteran of the operation, officer Oleg Marochko, told the young men and women from the Youth Association of Luganshchina[71] how the battle for the airport took place. [Marochko's] story was accompanied by a visual demonstration of what happened at the airport after the Ukrainian National Guard arrived, along with mercenaries from the 'Aidar' battalion. 'A year ago, we, the militia, controlled very little territory in Luhansk. We were surrounded. However, with the last of our strength, those that were left managed to regroup to try to get the city out of its encirclement', said Marochko.[72]

Such examples notwithstanding, the focus of war-related coverage on DNR and LNR news sites was firmly on Ukraine's behaviour. News articles often advanced claims about the illegality of Ukraine's actions under the Minsk agreements, its immoral behaviour towards non-combatants and prisoners of war, and the failure to maintain morale.

In the previous chapter, I argued that in DNR and LNR newspapers, the commemoration of World War II was often employed to establish a discursive connection between the Soviet Union's battle against Nazi Germany and the modern-day conflict, with the latter framed as a continuation of the fight against fascism. As illustrated by table 24, this connection was much less prominent online. Only *Luganskii*

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[69] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Voennosluzhashchii VSU Stal Zhertvoi P'ianykh 'razborok' kievskikh Silovikov - Narodnaia Militsiia," *Www.lug-Info.com*, March 26, 2016, http://lug-info.com/news/one/voennosluzhaschii-vsu-stal-zhertvoi-pyanykh-razborok-kievskikh-silovikov-narodnaya-militsiya-11931; Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Kievske SMI Podtverdili Rost Neboevykh Poter' v VSU Iz-Za P'ianstva - Narodnaia Militsiia," *Www.lug-Info.com*, May 4, 2016, http://lug-info.com/news/one/kievskie-smi-podtverdili-rost-neboevykh-poter-v-vsu-iz-za-pyanstva-narodnaya-militsiya-13218.
[70] In original: «Урок Мужества»
[71] In original: Ассоциация Молодежи Луганщины
[72] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "'Urok Muzhestva' dlia Molodezhi Proshel v Luganskom Aeroportu v Godovshchinu Ego Osvobozhdeniia," *Www.lug-Info.com*, August 31, 2015, http://lug-info.com/news/one/urok-muzhestva-dlya-molodezhi-lnr-proveli-na-ruinakh-luganskogo-aeroporta-osvobozhdennogo-god-nazad-6234.

Informatsionnyi Tsentr has a topic (08) that relates to World War II, while the other three outlets do not. Again, this is not to say that World War II was never an object of commemoration, but simply that it was much less prominent than in DNR and LNR newspapers. For example, *DONi News* quoted Aleksandr Zakharchenko talking about how the city of Kyiv changed after 2014:

> According to [Zakharchenko], now Kiev faces hard times: 'Certainly in Kiev there was the armed coup, and this city was given to the armed gangs of national radicals to be plundered. And if the usurpers have sent the armed punishers and bandits to our home, then Kiev has undergone the improbable political terror, comparable unless with times of Nazi occupation during the Great Patriotic War.' The Head of the [DNR] has emphasized that Kiev needs to be liberated as it was during the Great Patriotic War.[73]

On both *DNR24* and *Lugansk1 Info*, however, World War II also did not serve as an agent in identity discourse in the same way that it did in DNR and LNR newspapers: indeed, few direct comparisons were made between World War II and the present-day Donbas conflict. The war would be mentioned, for example, in the context of the destruction of a World War II monument in Dnipro[74], a concert that was organised for World War II and Afghanistan war veterans[75], a brief report about Victory Day celebrations on May 9[76], and an article reminding audiences of the war crimes committed against Polish citizens by Ukrainian members of the SS in 1944[77]. Overall, however, reports mentioning the war were sparse, and even fewer drew a direct connection between the war years and the present-day conflict. This stands in stark contrast with DNR and LNR newspapers, where the war, while underspecified, was part of an identity discourse aimed at the local population.

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[73] DONi News, "Zakharchenko to Hold Direct Line with Kiev on June 22," *Www.dnipress.com*, June 17, 2016, https://dnipress.com/en/posts/zakharchenko-to-hold-direct-line-with-kiev-on-june-22/.

[74] Lugansk1 Info, "Skul'pturu Neizvestnogo Ofitsera Raspilili Dlia Sdachi Na Metallolom v Dnepropetrovskoi Oblasti," *www.lugansk1.info*, April 21, 2017, http://lugansk1.info/30571-skulpturu-neizvestnogo-ofitsera-raspilili-dlya-sdachi-na-metallolom-v-dnepropetrovskoj-oblasti/.

[75] Lugansk1 Info, "Veteranov Velikoi Otechestvennoi 'afgantsev' pozdravili Kontsertom v Luganskoi Filarmonii," *www.lugansk1.info*, February 15, 2016, http://lugansk1.info/8176-veteranov-velikoj-otechestvennoj-i-afgantsev-pozdravili-kontsertom-v-luganskoj-filarmonii/.

[76] DNR24, "Den' Pobedy v Stolitse DNR Otmetiat Paradom Voennoi Tekhniki Vremen VOV - Komandovanie," *www.dnr24.com*, April 19, 2017, https://dnr24.com/main/27157-den-pobedy-v-stolice-dnr-otmetyat-paradom-voennoy-tehniki-vremen-vov-komandovanie.html.

[77] DNR24, "Kiev Otvetil Na Reshenie Varshavy Ne Puskat' Ukraintsev V 'mundirakh SS,'" *www.dnr24.com*, November 4, 2017, https://dnr24.com/main/28383-kiev-otvetil-na-reshenie-varshavy-ne-puskat-ukraincev-v-mundirah-ss.html.

5.3.3 Shaming the enemy

The third narrative that I will examine in more detail is how the enemy is portrayed, primarily through the trope of shame. I will do so by examining two salient themes: international and Ukrainian politics.

5.3.3.1 International politics

Of the four topics in table 23 above (in the "business as usual" section) relating to international politics (DONi News-06, -10; Lugansk1Info-12; -15), three are about US-Russia relations and the annexation of Crimea (with terms like "Trump", "Putin", "recognition" and "sanctions"), and one is about Ukrainian politics. As might be expected, articles about the USA, Russia and Crimea covered topics like military cooperation between the US and Ukraine[78]; European efforts to support Ukrainian reunification[79]; US President Donald Trump's scepticism of getting the US involved in foreign entanglements[80]; and the supposed failure on the part of the international MH17 investigation team to involve Russia in the investigation[81]. Broadly speaking, however, international politics was a significant topic of discussion only in *DONi News*, which covered, among other things, UN resolutions about Donbas. Its coverage recalls familiar tropes explored in the previous chapter, such as those conflating present-day Ukraine (and its western allies) with Nazi Germany:

> A UN General Assembly committee has passed a resolution 'combating glorification of Nazism', with 126 countries voicing their support. Meanwhile, the US, Ukraine and Canada voted 'against'. Moscow has called the decision 'regrettable' and 'bewildering'. The resolution, which was initially proposed by Russia and co-authored by 52 states, including Brazil, China, India, and Kazakhstan, deals with measures to fight the glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism, and other practices that facilitate the escalation of modern forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance. Another 53 countries,

[78] DONi News, "US Begins Deliveries of Anti-Tank Weapons to Ukraine - Document Leak," *Www.dnipress.com*, August 13, 2017, https://dnipress.com/en/posts/us-begins-deliveries-of-anti-tank-weapons-to-ukraine-document-leak/.
[79] DONi News, "Poroshenko Says No to Federalization – the Trident Will Return to Donbass and to the Crimea," *Www.dnipress.com*, January 22, 2016, https://dnipress.com/en/posts/poroshenko-says-no-to-federalization-the-trident-will-return-to-donbass-and-to-the-crimea/.
[80] DNR24, "Tramp Otkazalsia Vmeshivat'sia v Konflikt Na Vostoke Ukrainy," *www.dnr24.com*, December 7, 2016, https://dnr24.com/main/25860-tramp-otkazalsya-vmeshivatsya-v-konflikt-na-vostoke-ukrainy.html.
[81] DNR24, "Unichtozhenie Reisa MH17. Neozhidannyi Povorot," *www.dnr24.com*, August 30, 2017, https://dnr24.com/main/27998-unichtozhenie-reysa-mn17-neozhidannyy-povorot.html.

including the European Union nations and NATO members abstained from the vote. Last year, 115 countries voted in support of a similar resolution, with three countries voting against – the US, Canada, and Ukraine.[82]

On all news sites in the corpus, the West (meaning: Europe and the USA) was portrayed as hypocritical in dealing with the Donbas and Crimea crises. Western journalists who disagreed with "western propaganda" about Ukraine, Crimea and Donbas, were praised for their convictions:

> Those voices in European media that until recently were alone in singing that something was wrong with the best of worlds (luchshii iz mirov), are now beginning to sound like a chorus. A sobering chorus (khor otrezvleniia), although not yet one of sobriety (trezvost'). European non-propaganda (nepropaganda) has so thoroughly distorted reality that public consciousness will have to take drastic measures against a hangover. Czech journalist Pavel Černocký, not sympathetic to Russia, has already come around to this fact. In his state of ideological hangover, he still thinks that Russia has captured Crimea and Donbas, but does already believe that peoples have the right to peaceful self-determination. Not much of a discovery (ne bog vest' kakoe otkrytie), but still: 'The problem of territories breaking away [from the state] can be solved peacefully, for example, with the help of a referendum or agreement. To name an example: Slovakia. Of course, in Crimea and Donbas, most of the inhabitants are Russian, and they have the right to self-determination.'[83]

Another topic of discussion is the Syrian war (see topic DONi News-10 in table 23), where the US was portrayed as a warmonger which, inadvertently or not, supported radical forces in the region (a frame that was also identified in two master theses about the framing of the Syrian war in Russian media[84]):

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[82] DONi News, "US, Canada, Ukraine Reject Again UN Resolution Condemning Glorification of Nazism," *Www.dnipress.com*, November 21, 2015, https://dnipress.com/en/posts/us-canada-ukraine-reject-again-un-resolution-condemning-glorification-of-nazism/.

[83] Lugansk1 Info, "Varianty Real'nosti v Real'nosti Bez Variantov," *www.lugansk1.info*, December 8, 2016, http://lugansk1.info/24753-varianty-realnosti-v-realnosti-bez-variantov/.

[84] Amélie Godefroidt, "What's in a Frame? Framing of the Syrian War: A Comparative Analysis of European, American and Russian Newspapers" (KU Leuven, 2014), https://www.academia.edu/9515903/What_s_in_a_Frame_Framing_of_the_Syrian_war.; and Menna-t-Allah Hussein Abd El Rahman Kamal, "The Syrian Public Opinion versus Frames in News Media" (The American University in Cairo, 2017), https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/cda6/36be98f24fc773c188cb8a80ae5e4cfe76d8.pdf.

> The United States has airdropped 50 tons of weapons and ammunition to its favoured 'Syrian Arab Coalition' forces - a US re-branded group known for its unreliability and for handing weapons over to al-Qaeda and ISIS. Joshua Landis, a Syria expert at the University of Oklahoma says, 'probably 60 to 80 percent of the arms that America shovelled in have gone to al-Qaida and its affiliates.'[85]

The discourse about the West on DNR and LNR news sites thus appears to be in line with the historical "anti-imperialist" sentiment that, as Hiroaki Kuromiya argues, has long been a key element of Donbas identity[86], although the target of this anti-imperialism has shifted towards being focused on the West, and the USA in particular. This discourse also closely mimicked Russian media's strategic narratives about the West as identified by Stephen Hutchings and Joanna Szostek, who write that "characteristics attributed to western governments by the Russian media include hypocrisy, risibility, arrogant foolishness, and a lack of moral integrity to the point of criminality"[87]. Anti-westernism, according to Hutchings and Szostek, has been "at the heart of efforts to establish the basis for national belonging" in Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union[88]. On DNR and LNR news sites, anti-westernism was a prominent trope, and discursively comparable to what has been observed in Russian media.

A second interpretation of this ostensible anti-Western discourse is that DNR and LNR internet media critique what Richard Sakwa calls Ukraine's shift towards "European monism" as a source of identity[89], in which the "European Union is representative of what it means to be European", a view espoused by many within Ukraine particularly since 2014[90]. From this point of view, the contested and as yet undecided question of what it means to be Ukrainian is not only debated and discussed within Ukraine itself, but is influenced by outside forces such as the European Union and the NATO alliance. Following Sakwa, DNR and LNR online media discourse rejects European monist identity and instead "seeks to retain historic links with Russia" as a means to contest

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[85] DONi News, "Washington Airdrops Tons of Weapons to Rebels in Syria," *Www.dnipress.com*, October 13, 2015, https://dnipress.com/en/posts/washington-airdrops-tons-of-weapons-to-rebels-in-syria/.
[86] Hiroaki Kuromiya, "The War in the Donbas in Historical Perspective," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 46, no. 3 (2019): 245–62, https://doi.org/10.1163/18763324-04603003.
[87] Hutchings and Szostek, "Dominant Narratives in Russian Political and Media Discourse during the Ukraine Crisis," 185.
[88] Ibid., 189.
[89] Richard Sakwa, "Monism vs. Pluralism," *E-International Relations*, 2015, https://www.e-ir.info/2015/05/21/monism-vs-pluralism/; Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2015), 86.
[90] E.g. as witnessed by banners on Euromaidan saying "Ukraine is Europe", alongside flags of the European Union.

what it sees as dominant Ukrainian nationalist narratives about Ukrainian identity. This conflation of Ukraine and the West, however, was not the most predominant frame, even within the theme of politics: here, Ukrainian politics took a much more central position.

5.3.3.2 Ukrainian politics

Ukrainian politics took centre stage on DNR/LNR news sites relative to the attention that was paid to local (DNR/LNR) and international politics. Language and language policy were key elements in this discussion (see topic Lugansk1Info-15, which contains terms like "iazyk" [language], "zakon" [law], "zakonoproekt" [draft legislation], and "verkhovnaia rada", [the Ukrainian Supreme Council, or Parliament]). In September 2017, the Verkhovna Rada passed a law titled "On education" (pro osvitu). Paragraph 7 of this law, pertaining to the regulation of the language of instruction in education[91], evoked controversy both inside and outside of Ukraine[92]. Politicians in Hungary and Romania expressed concern that the law would prohibit Hungarian- and Romanian-language schools to teach subjects in these languages and would instead make teaching all subjects in Ukrainian mandatory. Further concerns were expressed over the rights of ethnic minorities to teach children in their own language. The Venice Commission, an advisory body to the Council of Europe that consults countries in constitutional matters, in part agreed with this criticism, noting that the law lacked clarity and left too much room for interpretation, thus potentially putting minority rights at risk[93]. The discussion surrounding the law was also featured on the pages of DNR and LNR news sites. Specifically, discussions in Ukrainian media were re-reported, particularly when prominent Ukrainians express criticism of the law:

> The Law on Education, adopted by the Verkhovna Rada and signed by the President of Ukraine, constitutes a 'language raid', when at the expense of a different cultural space a monotony is introduced that will be deadly for Ukraine. This is according to the Kyiv-based, Russian-speaking poet Aleksandr Kabanov,

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[91] Council of Europe, "The Law on Education (*) (Adopted by the Verkhovna Rada on 5 September 2017)," Pub. L. No. 902 (2017), https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF(2017)047-e.

[92] Margarita Tulul, "Beyond the Scandal: What Is Ukraine's New Education Law Really About?," *Www.opendemocracy.net*, December 8, 2017, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/ukraines-new-education-law/.

[93] Venice Commission, "Ukraine - Opinion on the Provisions of the Law on Education of 5 September 2017, Which Concern the Use of the State Language and Minority and Other Languages in Education, Adopted by the Commission at Its 113th Plenary Session (Venice, 8-9 December 2017)" (Venice, 2017), https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2017)030-e.

writing in the commentary section of the publication *Gordon*. 'That this law rocks the societal boat during a time of war and economic collapse is without a doubt. Symon Petliura[94] was right: 'one shouldn't be so afraid of lice from Moscow so much as of nits from Ukraine…'"[95]

Another representative example is an article stating that "The ministry of information of Ukraine submitted to the [Ukrainian Security Service] a list of sites to be banned for posing a threat to national security"[96], which mocked the Ukrainian government's decision to ban what it calls "popular websites in Ukraine" for "spurious reasons". Such articles would highlight the divisions within Ukrainian society and give voice to internal criticism of the Ukrainian government and armed forces. Other societal concerns within Ukraine were addressed as well. Table 25 shows the topics that relate to Ukraine.

Website & topic no.	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8	Term 9	Term 10
DNR24-03	Ukraine (ukrain-)	which (kotor-)	this (et-)	Russia (ross-)	year (god)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	Donbass	Poroshenko (poroshenk-)	one's (svo-)	president (prezident)
DONi News-02	ukrain	ukrainian	kiev	donbass	state	poroshenko	presid	countri	war	nation
Lugansk1Info-09	court (sud-)	SBU	Ukraine (ukrain-)	police (polits-)	oblast	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	journalist (zhurnalist)	case (del-)	arrest (zaderzha-)	criminal (ugolovn-)
Lugansk1Info-19	Poroshenko (poroshenk-)	president (prezident)	Petro (petr-)	Ukraine (ukrain-)	Saakashvili (saakashv-)	country (stran-)	Rada (rad-)	Verkhovna (verkhovn-)	announce (zaiav-)	power (vlast-)
LugInfoTsentr-02	this (et-)	Ukraine (ukrain-)	which (kotor-)	Plotnitskii (plotnitsk-)	head (glav-)	Ukrainian (ukrainsk-)	announce (zaiav-)	people (liud-)	our (nash-)	republic (respublik-)

Table 23: Topics related to Ukraine

The table highlights the connection between terms such as "Ukraine" and "Ukrainian" with terms like "war" (voina), "court" (sud') and "criminal case" (ugolovnoe delo). Instances of crime occurring throughout Ukraine were reported by DNR and LNR news sites with some regularity, emphasising especially the Ukrainian government's failure to prevent them:

> In L'viv oblast, several school teachers' partners were detained for arranging the trafficking of psychotropic substances and drugs from EU countries, according to the oblast police's communication department. 'Operatives of the Department of Counteracting Drug Crime of the National Police of Ukraine, together with investigators at the General Investigative Department for Procedural Guidelines of the Prosecutor General's Office, exposed the illegal activities of these drug trafficking spouses. The criminals, residents of the L'viv

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[94] Symon Vasyl'ovych Petliura was commander of the Ukrainian armed forces and president of the Ukrainian National Republic (UNR) between 1918 and 1921.

[95] Lugansk1 Info, "Ukrainskii zakon 'Ob Obrazovanii' iavliaetsia 'movnym Reiderstvom' - Kievskii Poet," *www.lugansk1.info*, September 28, 2017, http://lugansk1.info/40064-ukrainskij-zakon-ob-obrazovanii-yavlyaetsya-movnym-rejderstvom-kievskij-poet/.

[96] Lugansk1 Info, "Mininform Ukrainy Peredal v SBU Spisok Saitov, Ugrozhashchikh Svidomizmu, Dlia Zapreta," *www.lugansk1.info*, June 19, 2017, http://lugansk1.info/33936-mininform-ukrainy-peredal-v-sbu-spisok-sajtov-ugrozhashhih-svidomizmu-dlya-zapreta/.

region, established a channel to supply drugs and psychotropic substances from EU countries market them in Ukraine', [the police said].[97]

Other examples of articles about Ukraine's domestic problems include growing rates of tuberculosis[98], a lack of available vaccinations[99] and an energy crisis due to coal shortages[100]. The Ukrainian media, furthermore, was lambasted for its dishonest coverage of the situation in the DNR and LNR, as well as in Crimea, where life was said to be much better than portrayed:

> Last summer, a 'Ukrainian breakthrough' (ukrainskii proryv) occurred in Crimea. Despite the efforts of the Ukrainian authorities to scare people away from Crimea, so that they could not compare Russian reality with what they see at home, last year, residents of Ukraine began to choose Crimea as their summer holiday destination in droves. Life finds a way, and the fog of lies created by the Ukrainian media about life in the Russian Crimea is gradually dissipating.[101]

Such stories, which cover a wide range of problems and issues across the entire territory of Ukraine, contribute to a discourse that frames Ukraine as being embroiled in a series of perpetual crises that it is unable to deal with, and a population that is being lied to about the "real" situation in Donbas, Crimea or Russia by a dishonest national media.

Not only the Ukrainian, but also the international press was monitored for articles shaming Ukraine, in particular Western media[102]. One story on a French website was cited to highlight the Ukrainian government's attempts to rewrite history and deny its Russian imperial heritage:

[97] Lugansk1 Info, "Suprugi-Uchitelia v L'vovskoi Oblasti Naladili Postavki Narkotikov Iz Evrosoiuza," *www.lugansk1.info*, December 19, 2017, http://lugansk1.info/44230-suprugi-uchitelya-v-lvovskoj-oblasti-naladili-postavki-narkotikov-iz-evrosoyuza/.
[98] DNR24, "Rospotrebnadzor Predupredil O Rasprostranenii Tuberkuleza Na Ukraine," *www.dnr24.com*, August 30, 2017, https://dnr24.com/main/27994-rospotrebnadzor-predupredil-o-rasprostranenii-tuberkuleza-na-ukraine.html.
[99] Lugansk1 Info, "Na Ukraine Slozhilas' Katastroficheskaia Situatsiia S Vaktsinami Protiv Poliomielita," *www.lugansk1.info*, December 23, 2017, http://lugansk1.info/44480-na-ukraine-slozhilas-katastroficheskaya-situatsiya-s-vaktsinami-protiv-poliomielita/.
[100] DONi News, "Ukraine's Coal Reserves Will Last 3 Weeks at Most," *Www.dnipress.com*, December 8, 2015, https://dnipress.com/en/posts/ukraines-coal-reserves-will-last-3-weeks-at-most/.
[101] DNR24, "'Ukrainskii Proryv': Kto I Zachem Edet v Krym," *www.dnr24.com*, April 2, 2017, https://dnr24.com/main/26985-ukrainskiy-proryv-kto-i-zachem-edet-v-krym.html.
[102] Lugansk1 Info, "Der Spiegel: Skazki O Zlykh Russkikh - Patologicheskaia Politika Zapada," *www.lugansk1.info*, December 26, 2017, http://lugansk1.info/44620-der-spiegel-skazki-o-zlyh-russkih-patologicheskaya-politika-zapada/; Lugansk1 Info, "Donbassu Grozit Eskalatsiia Konflikta Pri Otstutstvii Politicheskogo Protsessa - L'Opinion," *www.lugansk1.info*, April 3, 2016, http://lugansk1.info/16407-donbassu-grozit-eskalatsiya-konflikta-pri-otsutstvii-politicheskogo-protsessa-lopinion/.

Agora Vox, a popular French online publication, has published a large article about the attempts of the Kyiv regime to rewrite the history of Ukraine, in which the authors remind Ukrainians that about 80% of their present lands were actually donated by the Russian tsars and Soviet secretaries general. The French publication also notes that with de-communisation, Ukraine is not only shooting itself in the foot, but is already putting a pistol to its temple.[103]

Another example is coverage of a non-binding referendum held in the Netherlands in April of 2016 about Ukraine's association agreement with the European Union. Voters were asked to decide whether they supported the signing of a partnership deal between Ukraine and the EU, and rejected the proposal by around 61 to 39 percent (with a turnout of approximately 30 percent)[104]. The referendum result was cited by DNR and LNR websites to claim that the idea of Ukraine's integration into Europe was a "fata morgana"[105], and that Europe "does not need" Ukraine[106].

This shaming of Ukraine in media both inside and outside of the country thus forms a cornerstone of these news sites' discourse. But while Ukraine's ceasefire violations and alleged war crimes were described in detail on both the Russian- and English-language news sites in the corpus, *DONi News* in particular would stress the role of the West in escalating the conflict:

'The cruel shelling of the civilian districts of the Lugansk People's Republic represents acts of pure state terrorism, conducted by the western backed Kiev regime. The trend has been worrying in the past weeks and escalation of the situation in both Donbass republics, growth in all kind of provocations, in political and military spheres, have been witnessed,' believes [Janus] Putkonen[107]. The Finnish journalist emphasized that apparently the West, led by US war hawks,

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[103] DNR24, "Frantsuzskie SMI: 80% Territorii Ukrainy Podareny Moskvoi," *www.dnr24.com*, April 23, 2017, https://dnr24.com/main/27188-francuzskie-smi-80-territorii-ukrainy-podareny-moskvoy.html.
[104] BBC News, "Netherlands Rejects EU-Ukraine Partnership Deal," *Www.bbc.co.uk*, April 7, 2016, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35976086.
[105] DNR24, "Ukraina - SShA: Khitrye Plany Dvukh P," *www.dnr24.com*, January 12, 2017, https://dnr24.com/main/26217-ukraina-ssha-hitrye-plany-dvuh-p.html.
[106] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Referendum v Niderlandakh Pokazal, Chto Zapad Otvernulsia Ot Ukrainy - Plotnitskii," *Www.lug-Info.com*, April 10, 2016, http://lug-info.com/news/one/referendum-v-gollandii-pokazal-chto-zapad-otvernulsya-ot-ukrainy-plotnitskii-12445.
[107] Janus Putkonen was editor-in-chief of *DONi News* at the time of this article's publication.

has again chosen military solutions in its destructive agenda to fuel geopolitical standoff between the West and Russia.[108]

The framing of coverage about demonstrations in Ukraine against the Poroshenko government makes use of similar tropes to the ones observed in the previous chapter, including an emphasis on Ukraine's "neo-Nazi" affiliations and overabundance of radical political groups:

> Representatives of Ukrainian radical nationalist organisations announced anti-government protests today, November 21 […]. These neo-Nazi protests are intended to be a continuation of the protests of 2013-2014, which led to a coup (gosperevorot) in Ukraine. 'The demands of Maidan were never met, the ideas with which we came remained ideas. Therefore, I urge that those who in 2013 and 2014 raised their heads and are yet to lower it continue the struggle and come out to Maidan on the 21st [of November]', [in the words] of the leader of 'Bilyi Molot'[109], Vladislav Horanin.[110]

Importantly, words such as "fascist" were also used by high officials, such as former head of the LNR Igor Plotnitskii, to refer to the Ukrainian government[111]. Similarly, *DNR24* employed terms such as "junta", "neo-Banderite" and "neo-Nazi" to describe Ukrainian political figures and the Poroshenko government, as in the following opinion piece:

> I think I'm not mistaken if I say that most experts and ordinary citizens of the former Soviet Union didn't expect to see what we all saw on May 9 in the Ukrainian territory that was seized by the neo-Banderite junta. People have finally begun to throw off the shackles of fear and psychological numbness that this neo-Banderite junta, led by Poroshenko, has put on them, psychologically speaking, between 2014 and 2015. The junta demonstrated its permissiveness,

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[108] DONi News, "Shelling of LPR Represents Acts of Ukrainian State Terrorism – Finnish Journalist," *Www.dnipress.com*, December 19, 2017, https://dnipress.com/en/posts/shelling-of-lpr-represents-acts-of-ukrainian-state-terrorism-finnish-journalist/.
[109] "White Hammer", or білий молот, is part of Pravyi Sektor and falls under a broader network of Ukrainian ultranationalist groups.
[110] Lugansk1 Info, "Ukrainskie Neonatsisty Zaiavili O Massovykh Antipravitel'stvennykh Aktsiiakh Protesta v Kieve," *www.lugansk1.info*, November 21, 2016, http://lugansk1.info/23718-ukrainskie-neonatsisty-zayavili-o-massovyh-antipravitelstvennyh-aktsiyah-protesta-v-kieve/.
[111] Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr, "Fashistskie Idei v Kieve Budut Iskoreneny, Uveren Glava LNR Igor' Plotnitskii," *Www.lug-Info.com*, December 17, 2014, http://lug-info.com/news/one/534.

impunity, rudeness, violence, and its animalistic grin of neo-Nazi gangs who seized power and did what they did not manage to finish in 1941-1945: the destruction of the people.[112]

DONi News used similar terms to describe the Ukrainian government and armed forces:

> It was reported that some units of the Ukrainian armed forces are not going to withdraw heavy weapons from the contact line in order to continue shelling the positions of the DPR's armed forces and civilian targets in the republic and the territories controlled by the Ukrainian authorities. Such actions are likely to have a goal to organize provocations during the preparations and holding of local elections in the occupied territories by the Ukrainian armed forces to blame the DPR's army to disrupt the Minsk agreements and to accuse the DPR of crimes that are being prepared by the Ukrainian Nazis against civilian population.[113]

Furthermore, *DONi News* would highlight the actions by Ukrainian volunteer battalions like "Azov"[114], which, while not officially being part of the Ukrainian army, nonetheless conducted military operations in Donbas under the command of the government. The outlet described it as an ultranationalist "lunatic fringe group"[115]:

> How is Nazism reproduced in Ukraine? Ukrainians raise a new generation of pseudo-patriots. Despite the economic downfall, which started in 2014, Ukrainian radicals, who came to power, have no intention of solving those problems. However, they actively undertake massive youth recruitment. Thus, 'Azov' regiment's gunmen published a video of the new children's camp shift

[112] DNR24, "'Besspmertnyi Polk': 9 Maia Na Ukraine Proizoshel Perelom," *www.dnr24.com*, May 11, 2017, https://dnr24.com/main/27322-bessmertnyy-polk-9-maya-na-ukraine-proizoshel-perelom.html.

[113] DONi News, "Mortar Attacks and Deployment of Tanks to Contact Line and the Buffer Zone- DPR SitRep 22.10.," *Www.dnipress.com*, October 22, 2015, https://dnipress.com/en/posts/mortar-attacks-and-deployment-of-tanks-to-contact-line-ja-the-buffer-zone-dpr-sitrep-22.10/.

[114] DONi News, "Mass Brawl with Ukrainian Military in Donbass," *Www.dnipress.com*, February 26, 2016, https://dnipress.com/en/posts/mass-brawl-with-ukrainian-military-in-donbass/.

[115] This sentiment is shared by some Western scholars as well; see for example: Andreas Umland, "Irregular Militias and Radical Nationalism in Post-Euromaydan Ukraine: The Prehistory and Emergence of the 'Azov' Battalion in 2014," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 31, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 105–31, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2018.1555974.

opening: boys and girls are inculcated Nazi ideology and hatred towards Russia from a very young age.[116]

Here, again, Nazism, anti-Russian sentiments and radical nationalism are framed as being central to Ukrainian politics and, importantly, society, although they are shown to be marginal in sociological polls and electoral results[117]. The activities of such radical groups were framed as being against the will of ordinary people in Ukraine, who were shown to be questioning these groups' sincerity and capacity to bring the conflict to a close:

> The Ukrainian citizens have started to wonder who really elicits profit from the war. Mothers of perished punishers[118] were picketing Poroshenko's administration demanding to stop the so-called "ATO". The question who really gets profit from the war came to the protestants' minds during the action, held by the 'Aidar' fighters, who made a stand against the criminal indictment of the 'ATO' participants.[119] These pseudo-heroes, who were robbing Donbas blind for three years, were all of a sudden outraged by the fact that they were accused of marauding by the Ukrainian government.[120]

Importantly, Alexandr Osipian argues that the "fascist" and "Banderite" tropes have roots in Ukrainian politics before the outbreak of the conflict, stating that the Party of Regions, the party of former president Viktor Ianukovych, began promoting these tropes as part of its campaign to build political support in Donbas[121]. The attention that DNR and LNR media, particularly online, devoted to these tropes indicates a continuation of a process that was started before the conflict (rather than starting "from scratch", as it were), the intensity of which was increased as the conflict broke out. On DNR and LNR news sites, there are thus three discursive elements when it comes to

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[116] DONi News, "Ukrainian Nazis Recruit Children [VIDEO]," *Www.dnipress.com*, July 13, 2017, https://dnipress.com/en/posts/https-dninews.com-content-ukrainian-nazis-recruit-children-video/.

[117] See for example Oxana Shevel, "The Parliamentary Elections in Ukraine, October 2014," *Electoral Studies* 39 (2015): 153–77.; Anna Nemtsova, "The Frightening Far-Right Militia That's Marching in Ukraine's Streets, Promising to Bring 'Order,'" *The Daily Beast*, May 2, 2018, https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-frightening-far-right-militia-thats-marching-in-ukraines-streets-promising-to-bring-order.

[118] Most likely this is a literal translation of "materi pogibshikh karatelei". A more regular translation would be "mothers of deceased combatants".

[119] The Aidar battalion, like the Azov battalion, is a volunteer military detachment under the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

[120] DONi News, "Participants of the so-called 'ATO' protest in Kiev [VIDEO]," *Www.dnipress.com*, June 22, 2017, https://dnipress.com/en/posts/participants-of-the-so-called-ato-protest-in-kiev-video/.

[121] Alexandr L Osipian, "Historical Myths, Enemy Images, and Regional Identity in the Donbass Insurgency," *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 1, no. 1 (2015): 131.

constructing Ukraine as the enemy: that of a government that is suppressing minorities, unable to deal with domestic problems, and being shunned by its foreign allies; of a society that is permanently riddled with economic and cultural problems; and of a political landscape that is dominated by and beholden to its most radical elements.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined discursive identity construction on 4 DNR and LNR news sites. At first glance, the conclusions appear similar to those from the previous chapter: internet content focused heavily on the conflict and Ukrainian internal affairs, while leaving ingroup identity underdefined and semantically impoverished. In addition, both newspapers and news sites weaponised emotional discourse, with a focus on evoking fear and anger among their readers. These conclusions, by themselves, show that the patterns observed in the previous chapter can be extrapolated to written media content more broadly, and that the discursive strategies online and offline display a significant degree of overlap.

With this in mind, there are a few differences worth exploring further. First, whereas in DNR/LNR newspapers more than half of all topics related to a narrative of "business as usual" (e.g. sports, culture, infrastructure, et cetera), they were much less evident online. Only a small minority of topics in the topic models fall under this narrative, with the majority of these appearing in the *Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr*-corpus (which serves a dual purpose of local and international press agency). *Luganskii Informatsionnyi Tsentr* was also the only one out of four websites in this chapter's corpus that paid a significant amount of attention to local politics. On the other 3 sites in the corpus, almost no attention was given to banal, "typical" affairs and events. Instead, such discourses were replaced, in the first place, with articles about the war. Across the *DONi News, DNR24* and *Lugansk1 Info* corpora, 27 out of 50 topics (54%) in the topic models relate directly to the conflict, in contrast to 17 out of 252 topics (6.7%) in the newspaper corpus in the newspaper corpus. Within this theme, there were three dominant topics of discussion: Ukraine's alleged violations of the Minsk agreements; the Ukrainian army's putative immoral behaviour; and the failure of the Ukrainian leadership to maintain morale. Whereas in DNR and LNR newspapers, World War II was also a highly prevalent theme in which the connections between the

Nazi occupation of the Soviet Union and the modern Donbas conflict were made explicit, this was not the case online.

The second major theme is the shaming of the enemy (Ukraine) by paying attention to domestic issues, international affairs, and Ukrainian politics and society. The key difference with newspaper coverage is that there was no mention of a shared history or peaceful previous coexistence that Ukraine violated; instead, the focus was almost entirely on portraying Ukraine as a failed state, guilty of war crimes, which has no business continuing the war, and which deliberately stymies all attempts at resolving the conflict peacefully. This theme shows a large degree of overlap with narratives about the post-Maidan Ukrainian government present in Russian state media[122].

Intermixed with this political coverage are articles on patriotic and cultural events organised by the LNR's ruling political movement, "Mir Luganshchine". Here, however, ingroup identity was asserted or assumed rather than explored in detail; articles that evoked patriotism or addressed cultural events or local politics rarely explored *why* readers should identify with the LNR. This held even more true for the other three websites in the corpus. None of this is to say that ingroup identity was never mentioned or explained at all, only that a person reading any of these websites on a regular basis would likely not find ingroup identity discourse to form a dominant part of what they were reading. This goes for all of the discursive "usual suspects", including "Novorossiia", the "Russian World" and the history of Donbas as an independent-minded industrial region.

One important narrative element mostly absent online but very present in newspapers is the concept of guilt. In the previous chapter I examined the prominent frame of Ukraine's guilt in betraying Donbas; the idea that Ukraine's actions were so egregious that they left the DNR and LNR no choice but to declare independence. Online, this sense of guilt and the lost potential for peaceful coexistence was replaced by outrage at Ukraine's alleged crimes; the difference being that there was no sense of a shared history of (relatively) peaceful coexistence whose loss was lamented. Exemplary of this point is the following quote, from an article in *Lugansk1 Info* about an interview

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[122] Gaufmann, "World War II 2.0: Digital Memory of Fascism in Russia in the Aftermath of Euromaidan in Ukraine"; Cottiero et al., "War of Words: The Impact of Russian State Television on the Russian Internet."

with Ievgenii Kuznetsov, an elderly Luhansk resident who attended political rallies on a regular basis:

> The presidency of Ianukovych is looked back on in a bad way. So the beginning of the demonstrations in Kyiv in 2013 did not raise too many objections. Ianukovych put the entire economy of the country under his "family's" control, says Ievgenii, and was therefore forced to spin around like a political weather vane. This couldn't go on for a long time. It was impossible to restrain [people's] dissatisfaction with the elites'[123] stupid greed. But Donbas, already educated by the bitter experience of the miners' protests, understood: forcibly removing a snout from the trough will attract other snouts, but will also tear the country apart. The people of Donbas 'remained silent' and through sheer willpower continued to keep the economy going while getting ready to have their say in the elections. Donbas was also restrained from protesting by the fact that Ukrainian neo-Nazis became the shock troops for the saucepan-donning protesters on Maidan. This did not bother the 'Europeans'[124] at all, but for the East and South of the country such a union seemed diabolical, and rightfully so. For a citizen of Donbas, to lie with Ukrainian nationalism, and even more so with Nazism, was tantamount to abandoning one's self, history, culture and faith. Already in February 2014, Ievgenii Kuznetsov was an active participant in rallies in Luhansk, where Russian banners were being flown. This prompted Kyiv's agitprop [to tell] Ukrainians that there were no Luhansk residents at these rallies, only 'people imported from adjacent regions of Russia'. But as Kuznetsov, as well as thousands of his fellow citizens knew: these people were his own.[125]

The passage above advances a commonplace trope in DNR and LNR media coverage: that of identity as an empty vessel whose contours are shaped by the enemy. Being a proponent or constituent of the DNR and LNR means, as Kuznetsov states, to *not* accept Ukrainian nationalism or, worse, Nazism into your home.

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[123] Here written as "ылиты" instead of "элиты".
[124] Here written as "Эвропейцив", a Ukrainianised version of the Russian "Европейцев", referring to pro-European protesters in Kyiv. The correct Ukrainian spelling is "*європейців*".
[125] Andrei Chernov, "Okopnaia Pravda Evgeniia Kuznetsova," *www.lugansk1.info*, March 11, 2016, http://lugansk1.info/11392-okopnaya-pravda-evgeniya-kuznetsova/.

The bounds of identification are thus set by the bounds of a narrative in which Ukraine is met with shame and alienation. Whereas in newspaper coverage the possibility of reconciliation was left open, the key point of *shaming* (rather than blaming) the enemy is to discredit its essence rather than its behaviour (in contrast with the conclusions in chapter 4). In this manner, DNR and LNR news sites engaged in what Richard Friman calls the "politics of leverage": as he argues, advocacy networks

> use public exposure of the target's human rights violations to mobilise the support of public opinion, international organisations, and governments of states, particularly those with international reputational standing and economic and military capabilities. The 'moral leverage' and 'material leverage' generated by the 'mobilisation of shame' in turn enables 'weak groups to gain influence far beyond their ability to influence state practices directly'[126].

The international reach of internet-based media was employed by DNR and LNR news sites to gain especially "moral leverage" over Ukraine in the eyes of international observers and audiences. As I have shown, the point was not to leave open a space for reconciliation, but rather to demonise Ukraine before the eyes of the world.

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[126] H. Richard Friman, *The Politics of Leverage in International Relations : Name, Shame, and Sanction* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 202. Friman here cites Margaret E Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 16–23, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt5hh13f.

6 Concluding remarks

From the start of hostilities in early 2014, the DNR and LNR authorities put great effort into building and projecting legal legitimacy. After taking power, they immediately sought to control the information space through media capture and by passing restrictive legislation, and put all the necessary structures in place to pursue an ideological identity project: not only in the form of a legislative framework allowing for such a pursuit, but also by taking over existing media and subsequently constructing a sprawling set of local as well as internationally focused media outlets. Over the course of 2014-2017, key DNR and LNR authority figures such as Aleksandr Zakharchenko, Pavel Gubarev, Leonid Pasechnik and Igor Plotnitskii regularly referred to historical or cultural concepts to justify the DNR and LNR's move to declare "independence" from Ukraine. Examples include the idea of "Novorossiia", the Donetsk-Kryvoi Rog Soviet Republic, "Malorossiia", the "Russian World", and the legacy of the Soviet Union.

Based on an in-depth analysis of tens of thousands of news articles published in local newspapers and news sites, I argue that the ingroup identity that the DNR and LNR authorities sought to build was not national, nor was it historical. Identity *imports*, or references to a shared historical legacy to foster ingroup identity, played almost no role in both newspaper and news site discourse. Identity *practices* such as "national" sports, arts and culture and *attributes* such as the Russian language and the Orthodox religion were not framed as part of a coherent and consistent identity discourse, although there is some indication that the Russian language was seen as an attribute that sets Donbas apart from the rest of Ukraine. Despite the importance that the DNR and LNR authorities assigned to the construction of a local ideology and local identity, both in public statements and in private correspondence, I have shown that the ingroup identity that the authorities promoted was diffuse and void of much detail, and failed to promote a sense of "historical continuity", "active identity" and "common public culture", the requirements for the emergence of a national identity according to Miller[1], as mentioned in the introduction. This inability (or unwillingness) to define a positive ingroup identity appears to be consistent with previous historiographical research about identity in Donbas. Hiroaki Kuromiya, for example, argues that "Unlike the neighbouring Don, which articulated political ideas in 1917 (such as 'Cossack

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[1] Miller, "National Identity."

republicanism' and 'Soviet republicanism'), the Donbas rejected all political groups"[2]. In the conclusion to his book, Kuromiya adds that "if […] people in the Donbas have never developed a large (national) perspective, it is simply because they have rejected it or, at the very least, it has not been their main concern"[3]. Developing a strong sense of ingroup identity, in whatever form, has thus historically not been the subject of a great deal of political effort in Donbas. This historical pattern re-emerges when looking at media discourse in the DNR and LNR, despite the ostensible importance that DNR and LNR leaders have repeatedly attached to the fostering of a strong internal identity.

In local media in the city of Kramatorsk, which was only temporarily under DNR control, the occupation was so unsuccessful in terms of identity building that it sparked a shift away from local identity (focusing on Donbas, its industry, and the city itself) and towards a national identity that was sympathetic not only towards Ukraine as a nation but towards its government and armed forces. It also fuelled discussions about how local tensions and insecurity about the future of Ukraine after Euromaidan could be reconciled with separatist sentiments, which were outright rejected.

Instead of a set of coherent ideas about ingroup identity, DNR and LNR newspapers and news sites projected a highly descriptive and detailed description of what the DNR and LNR are *not*. In local newspapers, this outgroup-focused discourse hearkened back to the history of conflict in Donbas, primarily World War II, and connected present-day suffering with the horrors of the past. The key theme in this regard is guilt: the Ukrainian government, which was portrayed as being comprised of Ukrainian nationalism's most radical elements, is seen as "guilty" of violating a contract with Donbas, thus reviving the memory of past suffering and, according to this logic, leaving the DNR and LNR with no choice but to secede. Externally, this discourse avoided historical discussions and comparisons altogether, and instead focused on shaming the Ukrainian army, government and the country itself. Here, again, we may look at existing historiography for guidance. Kuromiya mentions the importance of the (real or imagined) "enemy" in the history of Donbas: "The Donbas people also created their own images of enemies, using the official political discourse to suit their purposes. People who had suffered oppression for generations seized on the concept of "enemy" as a focus for their frustration and anger. Traditional prejudices surfaced and received

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[2] Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870s-1990s*, 3.
[3] Ibid., 337.

popular affirmation under a new label, the 'enemy'"[4]. While in earlier times there was a strong focus on anti-Semitism as a source of inspiration for constructing these so-called "enemies", anti-Semitic discourse does not appear to be dominant in present-day DNR and LNR media. Instead, the focus has shifted primarily towards the Ukrainian army and government (but not specifically the Ukrainian people), as well as a sceptical attitude towards the West.

At first glance, the topics of discussion in DNR/LNR newspapers and news sites overlap. Both extensively covered "typical" topics such as sports, arts, culture and weather, as well as the war and local and Ukrainian politics. The key difference between these two domains, however, lies in how they established a connection with the enemy. In newspapers, this connection was engendered in a sense of continuity in history: a connection that once existed has been lost. Reconciliation (or even reunification) was not portrayed as impossible, and a space for dialogue was left open. Guilt assumes some level of prior care, and draws a connection between past (when the Nazis invaded Donbas) and present (when radical, Nazi-like extremists are doing the same). The image of the outgroup that emerges from the pages of local newspapers is that of a group of radicals that have seized control of Ukraine. As shown by Sasse & Lackner's recent opinion survey[5], people in the DNR and LNR have not abandoned the idea of being Ukrainian. Instead, what they see as Ukrainian is different from the one that they assume is being promoted by the government in Kyiv. In DNR and LNR newspaper discourse, the story was that Ukrainian people could take corrective actions that may, in time, bring Donbas back into the fold.

In internet media, this sense of continuity did not exist. Instead, the dominating message was one of shaming the enemy. Ukraine was portrayed as a failed state across the board which, on top of committing war crimes and violating ceasefire agreements, failed to provide its people with the necessary amenities, being corrupt to the core. The possibility of reconciliation was not entertained. There was no sense that a connection that once existed had been lost. Instead, DNR and LNR internet media engaged in the "politics of leverage" by shaming and delegitimising Ukraine in the eyes of the international community.

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[4] Ibid., 7.

[5] Sasse and Lackner, "Attitudes and Identities across the Donbas Front Line: What Has Changed from 2016 to 2019?"

The aim of this dissertation has been to analyse closely identity building in the DNR and LNR. To do so, I have drawn on prior work on nationalism and nation-building, as well as identity studies. Aside from the conclusions above, this dissertation offers several broader contributions to these fields of scholarship. Methodologically, I have shown the versatility of focusing on media discourse and legislative documents to answer questions around legitimacy and identity construction. This approach offers an alternative to a more traditional bird's eye view of nation-building, which often focuses on policy, education, bureaucracy or official discourse[6]. I have highlighted the importance of media as an identity building tool, as well as a space in which horizontal discussions about identity take place.

Specifically with regards to content analysis, I have paid special attention to the key issue of proportionality. When analysing media content, narratives can be identified with relative ease, and illustrative examples can usually be found when a corpus is large enough. Much less straightforward is the question of how prevalent a narrative is within a large and representative corpus of media content. In other words, how likely is the average media consumer to be exposed to the identified narrative? I have shown that methods from computer science, combined with qualitative content analysis, can provide a solution to this question. I have also emphasised the importance of taking into account how "mundane" topics such as sports, weather or art exhibitions are portrayed and how prevalent they are across the overall corpus.

Speaking more generally about identity and nation building during military conflict, the Donbas conflict constitutes a rather unique situation in which a conflict predates identity: prior to 2014, "separatist" sentiments in Donbas were few and far between, and where there was disagreement over local identity, it was not framed within the context of independence for Donbas[7]. I show in this dissertation that a shared historical identity is not a prerequisite for engaging in state-building. Instead, those in charge of producing media discourse may also focus overwhelmingly on building an image of the enemy, and forego the need to convince internal and external audiences of the existence of a pre-existing set of shared stories that together comprise a collective identity. This conclusion has implications for the question of how a shared identity takes shape. Going back to Rogers Brubaker, identities may "suddenly crystallise" during

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[6] E.g. see Bourdieu, "Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field."
[7] Wilson, "The Donbas in 2014: Explaining Civil Conflict Perhaps, but Not Civil War."

times of conflict[8]. The question, however, is how: do people fall back on shared stories, or is negative emotional affect about the perceived enemy more powerful? This dissertation suggests that the latter may be more likely.

Finally, I wish to lay out some directions for future scholarship. As I have alluded to earlier in this dissertation, a comprehensive history of the modern Donbas conflict is yet to be written. This dissertation, I hope, offers a few directions for such a project. Second, as I mentioned in the "limitations" section, I have only looked at written content. An analysis of visual or aural media material within the context of identity building in the DNR and LNR would be a useful if not necessary addition to the project at hand. Furthermore, I have almost exclusively focused on media content produced inside the DNR and LNR. A comparative analysis of how the Donbas conflict is framed and discussed in DNR, LNR, Ukrainian and Russian media would yield further insight into where and how these different discourses overlap and differ. And lastly, I have not had the opportunity to analyse how the narratives that I have identified in this dissertation have influenced popular opinion inside and outside of DNR and LNR territory. Future work connecting these two dimensions is tremendously important to better understand not only the dynamics of this "forgotten war", but also the interplay between media content, emotional affect and identity.

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[8] Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe.*