

# Introduction: Russian Media and the War in Ukraine<sup>1</sup>

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This collection of articles focuses on the Russian information war campaign that has accompanied and fueled the war in Ukraine. Of course, neither side has a monopoly on the use of propaganda and disinformation, and the latter are always present in any war.<sup>2</sup> But we have chosen to focus here on the Russian state media machine, as a phenomenon that not only looms especially large over the events of the past year but is also bound to continue to play a major role in shaping future developments in the region and beyond.

Although the Russian government continues to deny its involvement in the war, Russian media have effectively been on a war footing since the spring of 2014. Consequently we have seen an extraordinary proliferation of “enemy images” of various kinds and in various genres, from lurid tabloid TV “documentary” films

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- 1 The research for this introductory essay was supported under the Australian Research Council’s *Discovery Early Career Research Awards (DECRA)* funding scheme (project DE150100838). The views expressed herein are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Australian Research Council.
  - 2 On Ukrainian information warfare, see Andreas Umland, “Lozh’ ne pomozhet ni Kievu, ni Moskve”, *Novoe vremia*, 27 January 2015, <http://nv.ua/opinion/umland/lozh-ne-pomozhet-ni-rossii-ni-ukraine-31315.html>; Marta Dyczok, “Mass Media Framing, Representations, and Impact on Public Opinion” in *Ukraine’s Euromaidan: Analyses of a Civil Revolution*, eds. David R. Marples and Frederick V. Mills (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2015), 77-94; Joanna Szostek, “The Media Battles of Ukraine’s EuroMaidan”, *Digital Icons* 11 (2014), <http://www.digitalicons.org/issue11/joanna-szostek/>; and “Ukraine’s Media War: Battle of the Memes”, *The Economist*, 12 March 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21646280-russia-has-shown-its-mastery-propaganda-war-ukraine-struggling-catch-up-battle-web?zid=307&ah=5e80419d1bc9821ebe173f4f0f060a07>. All URLs cited in this introduction were last accessed on 7 April 2015.

demonizing critics of Russian policy on Ukraine;<sup>3</sup> to hipster and *enfant terrible* Internet guru Yurii Degtiarev's semi-ironic viral videos with their preoccupation with the scatological and the grotesque in their depiction of relations between Russia, the near abroad, and the West;<sup>4</sup> and through to TV news reports and talk-shows recounting phantasmic atrocities committed by "ukro-fascists", from cannibalism to child crucifixion to the "genocide" of Russians in East Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> A more subtle take on events is presented to global audiences through vehicles such as *RT*, which deftly exploits the crisis of credibility currently afflicting Western mainstream media and liberal democracy by positioning itself as an alternative to US hegemony and hypocrisy.<sup>6</sup> Often, the depiction of Ukraine as over-run by US- and EU-sponsored neo-Nazis has been couched in the language of human rights, tolerance, and Holocaust remembrance, as in official reports based on the pseudo-monitoring of the persecution of ethnic minorities in Ukraine, such as the Russian Foreign Ministry's *White Book of Violations of Human Rights and the Principle of the Rule of Law in Ukraine (November 2013-March 2014)*.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, the Russian authorities have

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- 3 The most prominent of these was the *NTV* production *13 druzei khunty* (24 August 2014), promoted under the subheading "Traitors for export"; [http://www.ntv.ru/peredacha/professiya\\_reportyor/m720/0290376/](http://www.ntv.ru/peredacha/professiya_reportyor/m720/0290376/).
- 4 These include *Ya—russkii okkupant* (February 2015), available here: Nastia Golubeva, "My Duck's Vision: 'Russkii okkupant'—eto my, zakazchiki sviazany s gosudarstvom", *Medialeaks.ru*, [http://medialeaks.ru/features/0403ng\\_my\\_ducksvision](http://medialeaks.ru/features/0403ng_my_ducksvision).
- 5 See further *Grani.ru*'s "Budni telepropagandy" column, <http://grani.ru/Society/Media/Television/m.236984.html>; and journalist Aleksandr Ostashko's crowd-sourced inventory of fictitious Russian media atrocity stories; "Ves' bred rossiiskikh SMI za god", *Svobodnaia zona*, 11 January 2015, <http://www.szo-na.org/ves-bred-rossiiskih-smi-za-god/>.
- 6 See Paula Schmitt, "Why I Quit 'Russia Today' and Why It Remains Necessary", *+972 Magazine*, 23 December 2014, <http://972mag.com/why-i-quit-russia-today-and-why-its-necessary/100402/>; and Euan MacDonald, "Bordering on Lunacy: How Russia Defeated Western Journalism", *Blogspot*, 8 September 2014, <http://euan-macdonald.blogspot.com.au/2014/09/how-russia-defeated-western-journalism.html>.
- 7 *Belaia kniga narushenii prav cheloveka i printsipa verkhovenstva prava na Ukraine (noiabr' 2013 – mart 2014)* (Moscow: MID RF, April 2014), available at RF President's official website, [www.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d4da83f8a4e1696e94.pdf](http://www.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d4da83f8a4e1696e94.pdf). See further on this topic Viacheslav Likhachev, "Lozhnaia

organized mass Twitter campaigns carried out by automated “bots”,<sup>8</sup> and employ armies of “trolls” paid to pollute the online information space with abusive comments and anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western memes, often viciously misogynist or racist.<sup>9</sup>

The hatred and hysteria broadcast on Russian federal TV in particular have now reached alarmingly high levels.<sup>10</sup> The rising tide of aggressiveness and xenophobia across Russian state media more broadly has also gone along with an unprecedented and audacious disregard for journalistic standards of truth and accuracy.<sup>11</sup> While none of these are new features of the Russian media landscape, the conflict in Ukraine has acted as a catalyst that has greatly intensified them.

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informatsiia o ksenofobii v Ukraine—chast’ rossiiskoi propagandy, sprovozhdauiushchei vooruzhennuiu agressiiu protiv nashei strany”, *Ukraine Crisis Media Center*, 18 August 2014, <http://uacrisis.org/ru/vyacheslav-likhachov/>; and Maksym Yakovlyev, “‘Antimaidan’ posle Yevromaidana v sotsial’nykh setiakh: obraz vruga i opaseniia zhitelei vostoka Ukrainy”, *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropeskoi istorii i kul’tury* 1 (2014), <http://www.ku-eichstaett.de/ZIMOS/forum/docs/forumruss21/07Yakovlyev.pdf>.

- 8 For impressive and elegant visualizations of the Kremlin Twitter bot phenomenon, see Lawrence Alexander, “Social Network Analysis Reveals Full Scale of Kremlin’s Twitter Bot Campaign”, *Globalvoicesonline.org*, 2 April 2015, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2015/04/02/analyzing-kremlin-twitter-bots/#>.
- 9 A number of banks of these ready-made images have recently been publicized broadly; see for example Shaun Walker, “Salutin’ Putin: Inside a Russian Troll House”, *The Guardian*, 2 April 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/02/putin-kremlin-inside-russian-troll-house>.
- 10 For reflections on these features of Russian state media coverage, see Mikhail Yampol’skii, “V strane pobedivshogo resentimenta”, *Colta.ru*, 6 October 2014, [www.colta.ru/articles/specials/4887](http://www.colta.ru/articles/specials/4887); Anatolii Akhutin, “Protiv chelovechnosti”, *Radio Svoboda*, 20 February 2015, [www.svoboda.org/content/article/26834354.html](http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/26834354.html); and Arina Borodina’s comments on the responsibility borne by Russian TV for fostering hatred and aggression, cited “Strana prakticheskii ischezla s ekranov televizorov”, *Colta.ru*, 27 November 2014, [www.colta.ru/articles/media/5515](http://www.colta.ru/articles/media/5515).
- 11 On the latter, see Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014); and Mark Lipovetsky, “Anything Goes: How the Russian News Became a Postmodern Game without Rules”, *The Calvert Journal*, 10 March 2015, <http://calvertjournal.com/comment/show/3736/political-steampunk-postmodern-game-mark-li-povetsky>.

The resulting toxic combination of discursive violence and disinformation has already had important consequences, from inspiring volunteer soldiers from Russia and elsewhere to travel to Ukraine to join the fighting,<sup>12</sup> through to hindering efforts to present a unified EU policy response to Russian aggression.<sup>13</sup> In Western countries, ignorance,<sup>14</sup> Orientalist prejudice,<sup>15</sup> and generalized skepticism and disaffection are all factors that provide fertile ground for Russian information campaigns aimed at undermining the credibility of information coming out of Ukraine and discrediting the new Ukrainian government.<sup>16</sup> A strong tendency towards mythologization of the events and actors in Ukraine, present in the pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian coverage alike, has contributed to the sharp polarization of opinion on the war's causes and nature,

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- 12 The point is made by Yegor Lapshov, "2014-1941. Pochemu auditoria goskanalov voiuet s fashistami", *Slon.ru*, 7 November 2014, <http://slon.ru/calendar/event/1180893/>; and by Nikolay Mitrokhin in his article in this issue.
- 13 On which see further comments by the scholar of radical nationalism and xenophobia Viacheslav Likhachev, who points out that, for Western governments, "any doubts about the purity of the new Ukrainian government, including anything to do with accusations of xenophobia, are a wonderful pretext for inaction"; "Maidan i cherez sto let budet privlekat' issledovatelei", *Historians.in.ua*, 20 November 2014, <http://historians.in.ua/index.php/en/intervyu/1348-viacheslav-lykhachev-maidan-y-cherez-sto-let-budet-pryvlakaty-issledovatelei>.
- 14 As Sofi Oksanen has observed, "A people, which does not have an identifiable story outside its own language area, is a people which does not exist. It is easy to wipe from the map a country or language one cannot locate on a map"; cited Jukka Rislakki, *The Case for Latvia. Disinformation Campaigns against a Small Nation: Fourteen Hard Questions and Straight Answers about a Baltic Country* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), 219.
- 15 See Fabio Belafatti, "Orientalism Reanimated: Colonial Thinking in Western Analysts' Comments on Ukraine", *Euromaidan Press*, 27 October 2014, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2014/10/27/western-commentators-should-rid-them-selves-of-old-prejudices-dating-back-from-the-age-of-colonialism-before-commenting-on-eastern-european-affairs/>.
- 16 The frequent crude negative stereotyping of Russia in mainstream Western media, evident especially in the wake of the shooting down of MH17, has also been an important factor building sympathy for the Russian side. On the "Othering" of Russia over Ukraine, see Mikhail A. Molchanov, "Russia as Ukraine's 'Other': Identity and Geopolitics", in *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives*, eds. Agnieszka Pilukicka-Wilczewska and Richard Sakwa (Bristol: E-International Relations, 2015), 206-221.

including amongst scholars of the region.<sup>17</sup> In Russia, media “manufacturing of enemies” serves to reinforce an increasingly prevalent siege mentality, and to foster a climate in which political murders and other forms of violence become unremarkable.<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere in post-Soviet space, the Russian media framing of the conflict in Ukraine as a struggle to protect the rights and lives of ethnic Russians has the potential to further destabilize the region.<sup>19</sup>

One of the root metaphors used in the Russian media coverage on the events of the past year is the “Russian Spring”. This slogan heralds the “awakening” of Russians oppressed throughout post-Soviet space, but also more broadly a new dynamism in the Russian ideological and political landscape. Russian patriotic propagandists and political technologists claim a large share of the credit for enabling this regeneration via the twin achievements of breaking through the “information blockade” to project Russia’s narrative in the global information space,<sup>20</sup> on the one hand, and consolidating society around a new vision of Russian identity, on the other.<sup>21</sup> In this connection it is frequently claimed that the Russian

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17 On this phenomenon, see the *Ab Imperio* forum “Ukraine and the Crisis of ‘Russian Studies’”, *Ab Imperio* 3 (2014): 22-228; and “Andrei Portnov o voine v Ukraine kak faktore intellektual’nogo razmezhevanii”, *Ab Imperio*, 7 March 2015, <http://net.abimperio.net/blog>.

18 *Novaia gazeta* journalist Kirill Martynov recently described the Russian state media machine as a “machine for the production of enemies”; Kirill Martynov, “Memorial’naia voina”, *Novaia gazeta*, 28 March 2015, <http://www.novaya-gazeta.ru/columns/67827.html>.

19 See Kevin M. F. Platt, “Russia’s Powerful Media Bubble”, *Huffington Post*, 19 March 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kevin-m-f-platt/russias-powerful-media-bubble\\_b\\_4995783.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kevin-m-f-platt/russias-powerful-media-bubble_b_4995783.html).

20 See for example 1945, “Fenomen ‘rossiiskoi propagandy’ napugal Zapad”, *Internet-opolchenie*, 24 February 2015, [http://ipolk.ru/blog/infovoina\\_biblioteka\\_svedeniy/14658.html](http://ipolk.ru/blog/infovoina_biblioteka_svedeniy/14658.html). “Breaking through the European information blockade regarding events taking place in Ukraine” is one of the aims pursued by Nikolai Starikov’s *Internet-Militia (Internet-opolchenie)* project; Nikolai Starikov, “Otchet o deiatel’nosti internet-opolcheniia za fevral’ 2015 goda”, *LiveJournal* blog post, 3 March 2015, <http://nstarikov.livejournal.com/?skip=10>. The project’s website is here: [ipolk.ru](http://ipolk.ru).

21 See for example Oleg Bondarenko, “Ideologii ‘russkoi vesny’”, *Izvestiia*, 11 April 2014, <http://izvestia.ru/news/569094>; “Roman Maslennikov: ‘Kremlevskaia propaganda—samaia krutaia dukhovnaia skrepa’”, *Novyi den’*, 20 June 2014, <http://newdaynews.ru/propaganda/502304.html>; and “Yelena Yashina:

state media apparatus has recently gone through a period of major qualitative change, a “serious evolutionary spurt both technologically, and most importantly, in terms of content”.<sup>22</sup> As the Russian Baltic diaspora activist Dmitrii Linter puts it, Russia now has new media instruments capable of finally “teach[ing] the world to interpret our victories in a manner profitable for us” and of “really supplying new meanings”.<sup>23</sup> There is a general consensus here that after decades of defeats on this front, Russia has finally gained the advantage in the global information war.<sup>24</sup> For all these reasons and more, the Russian state media machine and the messages it broadcasts are phenomena that demand special attention.

What, then, are these “new meanings” that the Russian state media machine has been generating and disseminating in the course

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‘Kremlevskaia propaganda’ prevrashchaetsia v ob”ediniushchii faktor”, *Novyi den*, 3 July 2014, <http://newdaynews.ru/propaganda/503728.html>. On the war as ideological watershed and crucible of “new meanings”, see also Aleksandr Prokhanov, “Pevtsy i podletsy”, *Izvestiia*, 17 August 2014, <http://izvestia.ru/news/575376>.

- 22 Aleksei Martynov, cited 1945, “Fenomen ‘rossiiskoi propagandy’”. A key milestone in this narrative is the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, widely held to have been a “serious information defeat” for Russia, but one which also provided the welcome impetus for reform and expansion of the state media apparatus; see for example “Dmitrii Fetisov: ‘Propagandu smenila tonkaia rabota s obshchestvennym mneniem’”, *Novyi den*, 25 June 2014, <http://newdaynews.ru/propaganda/502721.html>. On the 2008 information war, see Margarita Akhvediani, “The Fatal Flaw: The Media and the Russian Invasion of Georgia”, in *Crisis in the Caucasus*, ed. Paul B. Rich (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 113-140.
- 23 “Dmitrii Linter: Nashi propagandistskie shedevry dostoiny Gollivuda”, *Novyi den*, 17 November 2014, <http://newdaynews.ru/propaganda/518184.html>. Linter is also involved in the “Novorossiiia” movement, founded in October 2014, and has acted as aide to RF Minister for Culture Vladimir Medinskii; see “Dmitrii Linter: Ob”iavleno o sozdanii obshchestvennogo dvizheniia ‘Novorossiiia’”, *Baltija.eu*, 31 October 2014, <http://www.baltija.eu/news/read/40613>; “Dmitrii Linter stal pomoshchnikom ministra kul’tury RF i vystupaet s dokladami v Krymu”, *rus.delfi.ee*, 22 October 2014.
- 24 On the topic of the global “information-psychological warfare” against Russia see in particular the numerous books on this topic by Igor’ Panarin, former chekist and currently professor in the Russian Foreign Ministry’s Diplomatic Academy. A summary of his views on this topic is set out in Viktoriia Dzhashibekova, “Igor’ Panarin: V informatsionnykh voynakh u Rossii dolzhen byt’ krepkii shchit i ostryi mech”, *Argumenty i fakty*, 24 March 2011, <http://www.aif.ru/society/24294>.

of the Ukrainian crisis? What are the stories that these resources are being used to tell, and what are the identities that they create and sustain? How has the new Russian information environment enabled and driven the events of the past year? The articles collected here offer some initial answers to these questions via the close analysis of a range of aspects of the Russian media discourse on Ukraine. They share a common focus on narratives and framing devices such as the metaphors and terminological labels used to classify and make sense of the events in Ukraine.<sup>25</sup> These are analyzed on the basis of Russian-language media content mostly from the spring and summer of 2014.<sup>26</sup>

Edwin Bacon starts off with a fine-grained and carefully contextualized narrative analysis of Putin's landmark programmatic Crimea Speech of 18 March 2014. Bacon highlights the ways in which the speech enacts subtle but telling shifts in the framing of Putin's "public political narrative"—in particular, a move towards a greater emphasis on ethnicity, civilizational identity, and national unity and univocality. In Bacon's reading, the speech "confirm[s] a decisive step-change in the story that the Putin regime tells about Russia and

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25 For a lucid and insightful recent overview of this topic, see Stephen Hutchings and Joanna Szostek, "Dominant Narratives in Russian Political and Media Discourse during the Ukraine Crisis", in *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives*, eds. Agnieszka Pilukicka-Wilczewska and Richard Sakwa (Bristol: E-International Relations, 2015), 183-96; and for a wonderful riff on the real-life consequences of linguistic choices, see Gasan Guseinov, "Kak tolkovanie slova privelo k mirovoi voine?", *rfl na ruskom*, 8 February 2015, <http://ru.rfi.fr/rossiya/20150208-kak-tolkovanie-slova-privelo-k-mirovoi-voine/>.

26 The issue of the representation of the Ukrainian conflict in global media more broadly is discussed in the panel discussion, "Ukraine and the Global Information War", towards the end of this issue. On this topic see also Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, "The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money", *The Interpreter* (2014), [http://www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The\\_Menace\\_of\\_Unreality\\_Final.pdf](http://www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Menace_of_Unreality_Final.pdf); Jolanta Darczewska, *The Information War on Ukraine: New Challenges* (Cicero Foundation Great Debate Papers), no. 14/08 (December 2014), [http://www.cicerofoundation.org/lectures/Jolanta\\_Darczewska\\_Info\\_War\\_Ukraine.pdf](http://www.cicerofoundation.org/lectures/Jolanta_Darczewska_Info_War_Ukraine.pdf); and Andriy Portnov, "Germany and the Disinformation Politics of the Ukraine Crisis", *OpenDemocracy Russia and Beyond*, 24 November 2014, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/andriy-portnov/germany-and-disinformation-politics-of-ukraine-crisis>.

its place in the world”, heralding “a new complexity and uncertainty in Russia’s domestic, as well as international politics”. Bacon also sketches out the main reactions to the speech across the Russian political spectrum, highlighting especially the diversity of responses from different ethno-nationalist groups and the potential vulnerabilities that this opens up for Putin domestically.

Next, Rolf Fredheim approaches the dominant Russian narrative about Western hostility to Russia, via an examination of an important but under-studied element of the Russian media landscape: the popular state-run translation web portals, *InoSMI* and *InoTV*. For the majority of Russians, these translation portals are the most likely point of encounter with the foreign press. The portals claim to act as a kind of mirror reflecting Western reporting on Russia, and their translations are often held up as primary evidence of endemic Western “Russophobia”. Fredheim argues that the portals should in fact be viewed as functioning as powerful filters for the state-controlled media system. He uses quantitative methods to demonstrate a clear selection bias in favor of translating articles on subjects “that can be easily absorbed into Russia’s dominant narrative about Western media” and which thus serve to reinforce the claim that Western mass media are monolithically and systemically hostile towards Russia. Fredheim also explores how Western media reports of various kinds are creatively re-purposed by these portals, and the ways in which the editors at *InoSMI* and *InoTV* endeavor to steer a course between translating usefully “Russophobic” texts and avoiding drawing attention to valid and well-substantiated Western criticism and analysis of Russian policies and realities. Fredheim’s methodology provides an innovative way of making visible the taboos and blank spots structuring the official Russian discourse (his graphs showing the dramatic dropping off of translations of *Guardian* articles on Russia during the Crimean crisis and after the downing of MH17 are especially striking here).

Tatiana Riabova and Oleg Riabov also address the theme of the dominant media discourse on Russia’s place in the world, but they do so through a gender lens. Their article comprises an extended gloss on the popular Russian media tagline “Gayromaidan”

and its political and ideological uses as part of what they call the “symbolic demasculinization” of Ukraine. Via the analysis of a diverse range of sources, they tease out the connections between gender, national identity, and security, showing how gender is used to “draw symbolic borders between Russia, Ukraine, and Europe”. As Riabova and Riabov demonstrate, the concept of “Gayromaidan” serves the primary purpose of providing a foil for a vision of Russian national identity based on the notion that the Russian state must act as a powerful guarantor of “normality” in the face of a degenerate West. The links drawn here between sexual and political “deviance” also offer a means of stigmatizing the political opposition in Russia.

At one level the new meanings that are being forged by the Russian media coverage on Ukraine are being shaped out of existing materials, in particular, the fabric of the mythologized memory of the Great Patriotic War.<sup>27</sup> A strikingly high proportion of the basic categories and tropes used in the Russian media framing of the current conflict draw upon the Soviet war mythology. The next three articles share a focus on the instrumentalization of the Soviet war memory via the media framing of Ukrainians as “fascists”.

Alexandr Osipian switches to a regional lens, and examines the special importance held by the Soviet Great Patriotic War mythology for the Donbass regional identity, and the ways in which related fears and prejudices have been exploited and amplified by the Russian mass media during the Ukrainian crisis and particularly during the Donbass insurgency of spring 2014. Osipian shows how these events were reported using historical categories borrowed from the cultural memory of the Great Patriotic War, such that “value-judgments about these events are built into the very form in which the information is packaged”. He explains how a new myth of “Novorossiiia” is being spun out of the old material of the Soviet Great Patriotic War myth, and he also traces the roots of the entrenched stereotypical image of the “Ukrainian fascist” back to the Party of Regions’ political rhetoric and sloganeering in the

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27 For a recent collection of articles on related issues, see “Forum: The Ukrainian Crisis, Past and Present”, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 16, no. 1 (Winter 2015).

2000s, aimed at building regional electoral support by creating a “phantom existential threat in the shape of ‘Ukrainian fascists’”.

Like Osipian, Elizaveta Gaufman focuses on the media framing of Ukrainians as “fascists”, and investigates the ways in which this frame relies on cultural memory. As Stephen D. Reese observes, frames “don’t just arise as free-standing entities”; they are “embedded in a web of culture” and they “draw upon a shared store of social meanings”.<sup>28</sup> Gaufman argues here that the “fascist” frame is powerful because it resonates with existing features of post-Soviet Russian war memory and identity. She shows how the distinctive constellation of meanings and associations linked to “fascism” in the Russian context make this frame an especially effective tool for constructing a sense of existential threat. She also sets out to gauge and compare the prevalence of this frame across different forms of Russian media, with a focus on TV and social media platforms *Twitter*, *LiveJournal* and *Vkontakte*. Her findings indicate a high degree of similarity between the framing of the Ukrainian crisis in “old” and “new” media. The key terms and tropes associated with the “fascist” frame were not confined to traditional state-controlled mass media but had likewise been taken up enthusiastically by social media users.

Next, Tatiana Bonch-Osmolovskaya shifts focus onto strategies of resistance that have emerged in Ukraine in response to Russian information aggression. She begins by surveying the dominant pro-Russian media discourse, describing what she labels the “hate memes” circulating in Russian media and showing how this negative coding draws heavily upon imagery related to the Russian memory of the Great Patriotic War. She then examines some of the main online grass-roots initiatives that have arisen in an attempt to combat disinformation and to provide reliable alternative sources of independent information on events in Ukraine. Next, she explores two very different cultural responses to

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28 Stephen D. Reese, “Finding Frames in a Web of Culture. The Case of the War on Terror”, in *Doing News Framing Analysis: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*, eds. Paul D’Angelo and Jim A. Kuypers (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 18.

the war: Boris Khersonskii's anti-war poetry, *Mass in a Time of War*, written during the early stages of the conflict in Ukraine and disseminated in the first instance online, via *Facebook* and *LiveJournal*; and the obscene anti-Putin chant, "Putin khu@lo", also known as the "Ukrainian Folk Song". Bonch-Osmolovskaya reads both of these as challenges to the dominant Russian narrative, and also as therapeutic responses to the stresses of war.

The Russian state media framing of the war to date has been complex and dynamic, not least because the war itself remains undeclared, and the Russian troops in Ukraine disavowed.<sup>29</sup> The blurred nature of the identities of the combatants is seemingly deliberately built into the Russian military strategy employed here and arises out of the nature of "hybrid" or "non-linear war" involving multiple and overlapping sides, a war of "all against all".<sup>30</sup> In the final article, Nikolay Mitrokhin guides us through the evolution of the conflict and the changing composition of the different Russian actors and forces involved, in a pioneering effort based on the painstaking compilation and analysis of the huge volume of disparate sources of information on the war that has been made available online by Russian independent investigations into the presence of Russian troops in Ukraine.

We round off this special issue by giving the floor to the journalists who wrestle with the practical and ethical issues surrounding war reporting and propaganda on a daily basis. We are grateful to Rory Finin, Director of the Cambridge Ukrainian Studies Programme, for kindly allowing us to include here the transcript of a panel discussion from the conference "Ukraine and

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29 On the resulting mixed messages and their effects, see Yelena Racheva, "Aleksii Levinson: Nel'zia krichat': 'Rossiia sdurela'", *Novaia gazeta*, no. 125, 7 November 2014, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/65985.html>.

30 On which see Mark Galeotti, "The 'Gerasimov Doctrine' and Russian Non-Linear War", *In Moscow's Shadows*, <https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/>; Peter Pomerantsev, 'Non-Linear War', *London Review of Books* blog, 28 March 2014, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2014/03/28/peter-pomerantsev/non-linear-war/>; and Peter Pomerantsev, 'How Putin is Reinventing Warfare', *Foreign Policy*, 5 May 2014, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/05/05/how\\_putin\\_is\\_reinventing\\_warfare](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/05/05/how_putin_is_reinventing_warfare).

the Global Information War”, held at the University of Cambridge in October 2014 and organized by the Cambridge Committee for Russian and East European Studies (CamCREES) jointly with the Legatum Institute in October 2014. The panel featured leading journalists and analysts who have been at the forefront of reporting on and interpreting the war in Ukraine for Western audiences. In this discussion, moderated by Anne Applebaum and Rory Finnin, the panelists share their experiences of reporting on Ukraine, and their reflections on the challenges posed by the Russian state’s foray into the Western news environment. As a follow-up, we then invited a number of specialists in post-socialist media to join this conversation by contributing their thoughts and reflections on the journalists’ panel discussion. These responses, which can be found following the transcript, offer a range of stimulating perspectives on the problems arising out of the information war over Ukraine and, we hope, represent the start of a deeper, ongoing conversation.