

# ‘Sometimes It Feels Like Every Word Is a Lie’: Media Use and Social (In)Security Among Finnish Russian-Speakers

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*This article examines the connection between media use and social in/security from the perspective of Finnish Russian-speakers. Based on 25 interviews conducted in Finland in 2015–2016, it analyses the ways in which people in conflict situations mitigate social risks and attempt to produce security by governing their use of the media. Drawing from von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann’s work on social security, the article argues that security studies ought to include transnational media use in their scope and broaden the emphasis towards the social and societal aspects of threat and insecurity. Furthermore, it explains how, in times of conflict, transnational media may turn into a digitalised ‘war zone’ with alarming consequences on the identification and social security of their audiences.*

*Keywords: Russian-speakers; media use; social security; Finland*

## Encountering conflicting mediascapes

When the conflict in Eastern Ukraine flared up after Russia annexed Ukraine’s southern Crimea peninsula in March 2014, there was a lot of talk about the role of the media in directing people’s loyalties and views on the events in the field. It soon became evident that there were significant variations in the framing of the conflict, in the portrayal of the actors involved and in the approaches to and perceptions of the conflict across the different national media settings (Innola and Pynnöniemi 2016; Khaldrova and Pantti 2016; Nygren, Glowacki, Hök, Kiria, Orlova and Taradai 2016). Changes in the media and in the increasing importance of citizen journalism meant that the events in Ukraine were transmitted into people’s living rooms and onto their computers and mobile devices across Europe. Simultaneously, concepts such as hybrid warfare, cyber threat and information influence started to appear in the vocabulary of European politicians, academics and the average ‘man in the street’ (European Parliament 2016; Riiheläinen 2017; Tapiola 2015). The link between information, media and security was established as strong and pivotal to the future of Europe.

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In Finland, these developments led to a rising concern over the loyalties of Russians and Russian-speakers (Rautio 2014; YLE 2014b, 2014c). Their positioning became volatile as discussions started in the media about whether Russians and Russian-speakers who live in Finland, and particularly those with dual citizenship, pose a threat to national security (YLE 2016, 2017). At the same time, worries were expressed over the spread of Russian propaganda and about misinformation in news reports and online (YLE 2014a). Concerns about the Russian minority's insufficient integration and media use existed in Finland prior to the Ukrainian conflict (Horsti 2014: 175). Nevertheless, there was now rising interest in Russian-speakers' media use and their integration into the Finnish national media space (Heiskanen 2015; Kauhanen 2016), mainly based on an assumption that migrants connect to their homelands because they want to remain loyal to them and that new communication technologies make such long-distance bonding possible (see Aksoy 2006: 925).

While the debate on the role of Russia and Russians with regard to national security continues, relatively little insight is being offered into the experiences of Russian-speakers themselves, their understandings and means of negotiating the shifting mediascapes. Already, in 2008, during the aftermath of the Bronze Soldier conflict which took place in Estonia over the removal of a Soviet World War II memorial, Davydova (2008: 407) noted how peculiar it is that there is so little research on the impact of Russian media – especially television and the Internet – on Russian-speakers in Finland. Dhoest, Nikunen and Cola (2013: 14) also claim that, while national audiences have been studied at length throughout the twentieth century, migrant audiences have only been added to the European research agenda in the past two decades.

This article attempts to address these concerns by contributing to the body of critical migration studies exploring and contesting narratives that present migrants as a challenge or even a threat to national security (on critical media ethnography, see Gillespie 2006, 2007). This kind of securitisation discourse dominates politics and media discourse on migration in the European Union and, to a degree, scholarly publications (Bigo 2002; Bourbeau 2014, 2015; Buonfino 2006; Messina 2014; Tsoukala 2011). Here, in this article, the aim is to highlight the agency and activity of Russian-speakers who live and consume the media in Finland and transnationally. Drawing from the anthropological theorisations of social security (von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 2000), I examine the interrelations between the media and social security and the ways in which people govern their media use in order to deal with oncoming insecurities.

Based on 25 interviews conducted in 2015–2016 in Finland, the article explores the ways in which Russian-speakers experience and interpret (in)securities with regard to their media use and the media practices in which they engage to produce security. I am interested in how they interpret the recent politicisation and polarisation of their mediascapes and how it has affected their (sense of) social security. The term 'mediascape' is adopted from Appadurai (1996), who uses this concept to denote the distribution of the electronic ability to produce and disseminate information as well as the images of the world that the media creates (Osborne 2002). The mediascapes – i.e., the 'image-centered, narrative based accounts of strips of reality' (Appadurai 1996: 35) and their contradictions are at the core of my analysis. Before presenting the results, I briefly discuss the study's theoretical framework, explain who the Russian-speakers in Finland are and describe how the interviews for the article were collected. Thereafter, I present the analysis and finish with the conclusions.

## Russian speakers and social security in Finland

*There are many lies, sometimes it feels like every word is a lie. There is also this one anecdote. A Russian calls a Ukrainian and asks: 'What is the weather like in Kiev?'. The Ukrainian answers: 'It is great weather, sun is shining'. 'No, it is not sunny, it is rainy and stormy'. 'What are you talking about? I just looked out the window and it is sunny there'. 'I watched the news and they said that you have storm and rain'. This is how it is, with my dad. He lives in Russia, and my aunt lives in Moscow. We don't talk politics.*

This quote from an interview with Nadya<sup>1</sup> reveals how her life and the lives of her family members are saturated by the media. Her insight concurs with debates around the concept of the mediatised migrant which Hepp, Bozdog and Suna (2012) introduced to argue that the everyday life world of migrants is shaped by media environments in (trans)national contexts. In their (2012: 173–174) view, the everyday experiences of migrants, like those of other people in Europe or North America, can only be understood by focusing on the interrelation between the different media and everyday practices, including the (traditional) mass media, as well as (new) media of personal communication (see also Madianou and Miller 2012). Hepp *et al.* (2012) also point to the analysis of the communicative connectivity of individual migrants and media networks – which include a more or less stable mix of media forms and practices. Such networks can be local or, as Nadya's case illustrates, can be transnational networks of diaspora as well as the centralised communicative networks of specific national mass media (Hepp 2012: 84).

Nadya's interview extract also shows how – as a transnational subject – she is positioned in the conjuncture of multiple cross-cutting mediascapes and how the different media produce their own truths for people to adopt. As Silverstone (1999: 6) explains, the media has the ability to filter and frame everyday realities and produce touchstones and references for the conduct of everyday life and for the production and maintenance of what is regarded as common sense. It is this construction of 'common sense' and 'truth' in the media which produces media content as a resource for the conduct of everyday life and reasoning, and consequently establishes a link between media use and (social) security.

Research participants' thoughts and feelings relating to media and security can be sorted into two larger categories. The first relates to the focus on national security concerns that Russian-speakers are compelled to negotiate. The second relates to how these security concerns and the negotiations that follow will affect participants' social relations, or what Flynn and Kay (2017), following von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann (2000), refer to as 'social security'. Their work emphasises a need to analyse social security in a broad sense by focusing on the complexity and range of ways in which people mitigate risk and produce securities (social, economic, personal and cultural) by drawing on their available relationships, resources and networks (von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 2000; Kay 2011, 2012).

Russian-speaking migrants in Finland are, in general, relatively well and diversely researched, although much of the research on their (in)security and well-being has focused on Russians and Russian-speaking women (Castaneda, Rask, Koponen, Suvisaari, Koskinen, Härkänen, Mannila, Laitinen, Jukarainen and Jasin-skaja-Lahti 2015; Heino and Veistilä 2015; Pöllänen 2013). Russian-speaking men and Russian-speakers from countries other than the Russian Federation are included in the research but to a lesser degree. While this discrepancy needs to be taken into consideration, it is evident that previous research gives a mixed picture of social security among Russian-speakers in Finland. According to Saarinen (2007: 132), Russian women have a high regard for social security and social welfare in Nordic societies. The women who participated in Saarinen's research argue that they feel safe in Finland, at least in material terms. They also claim confidence in the constancy of Finnish society and its ability to provide citizens with basic social security (Saarinen 2007: 132–133). On the other hand, researchers like Davydova (2012), Könönen (2011) and Pöllänen (2007, 2013)

have outlined the precarious social and labour-market positions of Russian women in Finland. Russians and migrant women as a whole end up unemployed and outside the work force more often than both those born in the country and many other minority groups (Busk, Jauhiainen, Kekäläinen, Nivalainen and Tähtinen 2016: 42; see also Forsander 2007). As Pöllänen (2007: 374) discovered, before moving into Finland, Russian women were used to participating in paid work in order to secure economic and social security for themselves and their children. However, in Finland, Russian-speakers face an unstable labour market and, often, a need to rely on temporary jobs and social provision to support themselves and their families.

Saarinen (2007: 141) uses the concept of *grey area* to describe the various ambiguities, (in)securities and dependencies that are present in the lives of Russian women in Finland. She acknowledges the importance of the Nordic welfare state for her research participants but claims that their social vulnerability is heightened by the stigmatised national, ethnic and gendered identification to which female migrants from Eastern Europe are subjected. Russian women experience the ethnicisation and sexualisation of their identities (Davydova and Kozoulia 2009; Reuter and Kyntäjä 2006). Russian men, too, have reported discrimination and othering. These experiences make it harder for Russian-speakers to claim the rights and responsibilities to which they are legally entitled (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind and Vesala 2002; Ombudsman for Minorities 2010).

Such a discussion is crucial for understanding why the approach, which equates social security simply with jobs and welfare, is too limited in scope. As Heino and Veistilä (2015: 96) argue in the context of families with Russian backgrounds, security can be explored on the basis of three different kinds of need: to protect against danger, to have continuity and order, and to maintain an inner mental and spiritual balance. On the group level, these needs manifest as, for example, a need for family security (Niemelä and Lahikainen 2000: 22). In Heino and Veistilä's study (2015: 96), families with Russian backgrounds received social support mainly from two sources: the authorities and other family members. Furthermore, in their case, social security and care are often organised transnationally. As Pöllänen (2013) argues in relation to Russian migrant wives who live in Finland, their transnational families are important sources of security as their members continue to care for each other even after migration. However, as the author goes on to note, the transnational life-style also creates specific responsibilities and insecurities.

This discussion is in line with the argument by von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann (2007) that social security includes much more than merely the mechanisms by which the state intends to ensure care for its citizens who cannot take care of themselves. Their (2007: 33) argument lies in the fact that in developed countries, too, including Nordic societies with relatively strong welfare-state systems, the arrangement of social security on the basis of non-state or market relations constitutes an important source of security provision. This is relevant particularly for migrants with relatives and family members in countries where social security relies much more on interpersonal/private sphere networks and relations, such as kinship networks. The sense of social security therefore presumes a trust in state protection as well as in the intimate relations of care and support. For the analysis of social security among Finnish Russian-speakers, it is necessary to expand the inquiry from their material circumstance to include their experiences of stigmatisation, and more broadly their social and political positioning, as well as the issue of transnational and transgenerational relations of care.

## **Data and methods**

The term 'Finnish Russian-speakers' refers to people of all ages with a variety of national, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, language identities and life histories (Lehtonen 2016). What the Russian-speakers have in common is the use of Russian as their native tongue and/or family ties with the (post-)Soviet space. The Russian-speaking population of Finland has grown rapidly in recent decades (YLE 2013), currently forming the largest group of immigrants speaking a foreign language in the country – at the end of 2015, they numbered 72 436 people,

a fifth of whom were under 20 years of age (Statistics Finland 2016). Most Russian-speakers live in major cities in Southern or Eastern Finland, near to the Finnish–Russian border.

In Finland the Russian-speaking minority is often perceived as divisible into ‘old’ and ‘new’, depending on the time of their arrival in Finland (see Leitzinger 2016). The terms ‘old Russians’ and ‘historical Russian-speaking minority’ refer to those (and in some cases to the descendants of those) who moved to Finland between 1809 and 1917, when the country was an autonomous part of the Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire. These terms are also used to designate Russians who moved to Finland after World War I – specifically, after the Russian revolution (Nylund-Oja, Pentikäinen, Jaakkola and Yli-Vakkuri 1995).

The ‘new’ minority, meaning the latest group of Russian-speakers, arrived in Finland after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This group, which is the focus of this article, is commonly categorised as consisting of Ingrian Finns – the descendants of Finns who emigrated from Finland to Russia between the seventeenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries – and other returnees, as well as of other Russian-speakers who came to Finland to marry and for work (Nylund-Oja *et al.* 1995). A number of people also went to Finland from the post-Soviet space to study at Finnish universities and polytechnics. As Davydova (2009) explains, people’s motivations to migrate often overlap and such clear-cut definitions, such as those based on the type of residence permit which individuals have obtained, do not describe the ways in which migrants themselves explain their decisions to migrate. On the other hand, Davydova’s analysis also shows that state rules and legislation to regulate migration simultaneously construct and produce identities for people during the migration process and afterwards.

This article draws on data collected as part of a wider research project – *Finland’s Russian-Speakers As Media Users* – which included an analysis of the media usage of Russian-speakers living in Finland, presented a comparison between the Finnish and the Russian mediascapes and examined the production of Russian language media in Finland (Davydova-Minguet, Sotkasiira, Oivo and Riiheläinen 2016; Sotkasiira 2017). The analysis of Russian-speakers’ media use and its interlinkages with social security is based on interviews conducted in Finland in 2015–2016 in Helsinki, Joensuu and Tampere. Altogether 25 interviews were conducted with 12 male and 13 female participants. All but two of the interviews (which were conducted in Finnish) were conducted in Russian, and then transcribed by the members of the research group. The interviews focused and gathered information on the participants’ past and current media use as well as on changes that had occurred in this respect. They also included questions about Russian-speakers’ media use as part of their everyday life and comparisons of Finnish and Russian mediascapes.<sup>2</sup>

The criterion for selection to be interviewed was that the person identified him- or herself as a Russian-speaker and was willing to discuss this topic – considered by many to be sensitive – with researchers (see Dickson-Swift, James and Liamputtong 2008). The sensitivity of this research is primarily related to the fact that the Russian-speaking community in Finland is divided in their views on Russian foreign and domestic policy. The participants explained that politics is considered to be a topic which divides people and which many prefer not to discuss openly. The sensitivity of the topic is also due to the fact that Russian-speakers, particularly those holding dual citizenship, experience mistrust from both the Finnish and the Russian governments (Happonen 2017; Jerman 2009; YLE 2017). Russia also holds a special meaning in Finnish public discourse; even to mention the words ‘Russian’, ‘security’ and ‘threat’ in the same sentence may evoke emotions and images that date back decades – to the years of warfare between Finland and the Soviet Union during World War II (Raittila 2004).

Our participants do not form a representative sample of the Russian-speaking population in Finland; instead, the sampling was based on a combination of feasibility and purposeful sampling. We first used snowball sampling and contacted colleagues and friends of friends to find interviewees. Furthermore, we asked partici-

pants to suggest others whom we could invite for interview. We also contacted the organisations of Russian-speakers to find participants who were unknown to us, as well as anyone we knew. The sampling was selective in the sense that we made a conscious effort, for example, to find participants of both sexes and of different age groups. We also looked for people from different Finnish regions and with various educational backgrounds and employment situations.

**Table 1. Information on interviewees**

Country of origin	Russia (16), Estonia (3), Ukraine (3), Kazakhstan (1), Lithuania (1), Finland (1)
Age at interview	18–25 years (3), 26–45 years (11), 46–65 years (9), over 65 years (2)
Gender	12 male and 13 female
Professions	Teacher, engineer, economist, lawyer, university student, interpreter, painter, mechanic, teaching assistant, graduate of a commercial institute, accountant, dressmaker, cleaner, restaurant worker, CEO, researcher, student (some interviewees were unemployed or received pay subsidies)
Length of residence in Finland	1–5 years (2), 5–10 years (7), 10+ years (16)
Level of Finnish	Excellent (8), Good (10), Weak (7)

Note: We did not test the informants on their Finnish skills but the evaluation of their language skills is based both on the informants' self-evaluation and interviewers' accounts.

The material on Russian-speakers' media use was analysed by focusing on the narratives that touch upon the different aspects of social security, namely the material, social, emotional and ontological aspects. I discovered that, while the material needs of participants were largely catered for, the participants experience media-related unease with regard to their social positioning and social security, and it is on this which I focused, together with their strategies to mitigate them. The use of 'traditional' and 'new' media were analysed together since, particularly in Russia, state television has a strong impact on agenda-setting on the Internet and in society as a whole. Cottiero, Kucharski, Olimpieva and Orttung (2015) argue that the relationship between television and the Internet in Russia is a continual loop, with each affecting the other.

### **The media as a source of insecurity**

Our Finnish Russian-speaking interviewees' use of the media is very versatile. They use both traditional means of mass communication as well as methods of personal communication – like the telephone, Skype, emails and so forth – to connect with people and make sense of events and developments relevant to their lives. Our findings therefore support the outcome of earlier research which has concluded that immigrants are an equally active and heterogeneous media user group as any other group in Finland (Maasilta, Simola and af Heurlin 2008: 81).

Ideally, transnational mediascapes construct relatively coherent worldviews for people to relate to. As Georgiou (2013: 319) writes, there is nothing extraordinary in sustaining links here and there and in being emotionally attached to various communities, in the same way that there is nothing unusual in watching and enjoying programmes and channels in different languages. In particular, when people struggle with anxieties related to finding their way in new surroundings, the transnational media has an important role to play – for example, in alleviating home-sickness by providing an accessible means of communication with communities

to which people seek to belong (Wong 2017). The media may assume the role of a friend who has lived in the country longer and already knows his/her way around, as well as perhaps helping others to keep in touch with family and friends in the places of origin.

Our participants also argue that, up until recently, their relationship with the media was fairly unproblematic or that the problems they faced were similar to those of any other media-user in Finland, with the exception of those who grew up in Soviet times and regard the then-media as particularly propagandist and fake. However, for the most part, the participants describe everyday media conflicts as situations in which they, for example, felt a need to limit their exposure to because it ate up too much of their time; they also discussed the circumstances in which they, as parents, worried that their children spend too much time on the computer.

While such individual concerns persist, the conflicts that respondents describe as part of their current media landscape are much more likely to relate to political insecurities and tensions at national or international levels. For many interviewees, the Ukrainian conflict was a milestone which marked a change in their attitudes towards the media and in the way in which the Russian and Western media construct reality. An understanding prevailed among our participants that the Russian national mediascape is very different when compared to Finnish or European mediascapes. Nikolay, a young man in his twenties, explained the situation like this:

*[My media use] has changed a lot because the Finnish media blames Russia for everything and the Russian media blames the West. (...) In Russia, they have, kind of, learnt the Western way to broadcast news. It means that you don't provide people with false facts but you give partial information. Like, let's think what happened in Syria. Russians are bombarding there and so forth. It was quite interesting that, in the Finnish media, they immediately focused on civilian casualties. (...) In the Russian news there was no mention of civilian casualties or casualties at all, while in Russia they always state how many casualties Americans are responsible for. (...) There is a clear contradiction. Russia is good, no, I mean Russia is bad and Europe is good. Finland is part of Europe, Europe is good; Europe is in the west, Yankees [sic] are in the west, Yankees are good. It is so clear and annoying. That's why I can't take all Finnish media seriously. (...) Like my grandmother, she calls Finnish news American propaganda, and here Russian news is called Russian propaganda. This kind of contradiction has emerged.*

Interviewees commonly describe the Russian and, to a lesser degree, also the Finnish media as state propaganda (for comparisons see Dougherty and Kaljurand 2015; Juzefovics 2013). Alternatively, they argue that the media is being distorted by the capitalist market system, which disregards truth in its pursuit to get more 'clicks' and revenue. In the Russian context, participants claim to recognise a particular subtext or undertone in practically any mainstream media content (see also Cottiero *et al.* 2015). They argue that television news, in particular, contains messages that are not expressed directly but are implicit and understood only by those who have lived in Russia or the Soviet Union. According to the participants, the dominant discourse in the Russian mainstream media is built around state patriotism: television news is designed to evoke emotions by providing viewers with an irresistible wealth of images, facts and information. Finnish news, on the other hand, is regarded as more neutral, shorter and less analytical. This said, the participants also stated that the Western media is partial and manipulates opinions and that the Finnish media has a tendency to portray Russia and Russians in a negative light. Interestingly, some interviewees argued that Russian news tends to exaggerate positive societal developments, while others described it as particularly gloomy and saddening. *It is all death, blood and catastrophes*, argues Mariya, a 28-year-old, who has lived in Finland for several years and now watches Russian television mainly when visiting her parents in Saint Petersburg.

According to our interviewees, the Ukrainian conflict and its intersection with conflicting political loyalties are clearly visible in their everyday lives. Adults as well as children have all found themselves on opposite

sides of the conflict. Many people blame this awkward situation on the media and its tendency to take sides and exaggerate the differences of opinion. Maksim relates how his whole family is now part of the conflict:

*We also get information from our children, based on what they say after school. I mean how Finnish children evaluate events. This is how we receive information about the Finnish media. These ideas must come from somewhere and I suppose they come from the Finnish media. They tell our children and our children tell us that Putin is not liked and things such as 'Putin is Hitler'. Actually, it is not just Finnish children who talk like this; also Russian-speaking children who go to the same school do that. I find it strange. I have also been asked why the Finnish media slags off Russia. I cannot say if they do that or not, since I don't follow it, but I have the impression that the Finnish media portrays the Ukrainian conflict in a biased manner when it comes to, for example, Russia's role in it. Things are not so straightforward. It is complicated there. It is not as simple as Russia attacking Ukraine and that is it.*

The impression of the Finnish media distorting reality is strong and is shared by those who, like Maksim, do not follow the Finnish media at all. This would suggest that this image at least partially derives from everyday encounters, such as those described above, as well as from other, mainly Russian media sources. On the other hand, even greater differences of opinion are perceived between Russian and Ukrainian or Russian and Western mediascapes than between Russian and Finnish mediascapes (see Nygren *et al.* 2016).

Ekaterina, a middle-aged woman who lives in the South of Finland, discusses a tendency to stereotype Russians and Ukrainians based on their media choices. She also calls attention to the interconnections between what people come across in the media and how they relate to each other in the real world:

*There are changes. Not only because of the influence of the media. Rather it seems to me that people are affected by changes taking place in the real world, because they believe everything. 'Well, your Russian channels are full of propaganda'. But you also have propaganda on your side. Isn't that correct? I mean those same Ukrainians. I just know that even families have broken up. People break up in different directions, because one says that 'You are Kremlin's zombie', and the second says, 'But you are zombified by Maidan' and that's all. Especially now when people are really shaken up. It's difficult. It seems to me that news will not get through to people, because they have already made up their minds. What a painful topic this is.*

The interviewees find such encounters emotionally and socially upsetting. They worry about the psychological consequences of being subjected to propagandist and violent media coverage. Inga, for one, is concerned about her state of mind being affected by the tragic contents of news bulletins as well as by the style in which they are presented. She finds it important to protect herself and especially her child from certain types of media:

*Well, firstly, the information that is being delivered is not true and the style of broadcasting is aggressive, it does not raise any positive emotions. And, secondly, maybe because there is a small child in the house, you know, if the TV is on. When you watch TV, it happens that they show documentary plots, excerpts that are not meant for children's eyes and it's very dangerous for a child's psyche. News in Russian is dangerous for your health [laughs]. At least for children it is horrid. Just recently, they were broadcasting about Ukraine, and the child passed by and saw the bloody documentary shootings. He was in shock and said that we cannot go to see his grandmother, because there is war and everybody gets killed.*



Previous research has outlined the ways in which Finnish Russian-speakers give and receive care transnationally and inter-generationally (Pöllänen 2013). Both the older relatives, who have stayed behind, for example, in Russia or Estonia, as well as the young children born in Finland, are looked after across generations and national borders (Tiaynen 2013; Tiaynen-Qadir 2016). The current situation, however, puts these relations of care and security in jeopardy. The participants give numerous examples of how conflicts in the media and real life have become intermingled and how they play out even in the most intimate of relationships. Nikolay, for one, was close to his grandmother. He has been an important link between Finnish society and the grandmother, who does not speak much Finnish. Recently, however, the grandmother's orientation towards Russia has complicated their relationship, which Nikolay finds unsettling.

***Nikolay:** There are many, like my grandmother, who live in Finland and don't speak much Finnish or watch any local news. The only source of information for her is me and my sister. She asks: 'What is really happening here? Can you tell me? I cannot make out what they say, on television they fuss about [President] Niinistö doing this and doing that, are we going to join NATO or not, what is this, oh my, we are not going to NATO, are we?'*

***Researcher:** So she sort of gets the Finnish language...*

***Nikolay:** I explain to her in Russian. But, you know, now my relationship with grandma, I haven't had much contact because her views on any topic are quite radical. That's why she has been in touch with her son who lives in Russia. They are in sync. They have formed a kind of a circle.*

Nikolay is not the only participant, who accounts for relationships being strained or broken due to Russian-speakers' different worldviews – which are linked with their divergent political and media orientations. In fact, such stories are common among the participants. On the other hand, his narrative also illustrates how changing worldviews and media practices 'push' people into new alliances and relationships. Nikolay's grandmother, who used to be close to her grandchildren, now spends more time talking to her son who lives in Russia than to her children and grandchildren who live in the same country. It is thus possible that, through multilevel communication networks, Russian-speakers' experiences of community, identity and security are detached from their specific geographical locations and given a transnational frame (Budarick 2015; Georgiou 2013; Shields 2014). At the same time, however, the media actualises its potential to reinforce the reterritorialisation of Russian-speakers' identities as well as create social divisions in and between societies.

### **Negotiating insecurity through media use**

Based on our interviews, it appears that Russian-speakers' social relations and their sense of security are affected by news reporting of the Ukrainian conflict, by people's responses to it and by their specific encounters with these experiences in their intimate relations. In some ways, people find it difficult to escape the resulting emotional and social distress: they are startled by the media's influence over the issues that people think about and its ability to penetrate their lives. On the other hand, the interviews also reveal ways in which Russian-speakers exert authority over these dynamics (see also Qureshi 2007). For example, the participants referred to their discomfort at watching particular images or reports on television or in social media and referred to their more or less conscious withdrawal of attention from such news. Their interest in some types of media content and withdrawal from other types can also be analysed as a way of managing the potential of news to undermine their sense of security and pose risks to their social relations. As Qureshi (2007: 303) remarks, these notions

echo Giddens' (1990: 132) discussion of how people deal with risks to their ontological security so as not to paralyse their ordinary day-to-day life.

In her work on the responses of London's Turkish-speaking migrants to the events surrounding 9/11, Aksoy (2006: 936) demonstrates the variety of responses from her research participants as well as the importance of temporal considerations to assessing their media use and its motives. The initial response by Turkish-speaking migrants was to assume an active search for reliable information and the consumption of various news sources. Over time, however, their attitudes changed and scepticism started to gain ground as participants began to view all media as equally biased and unreliable. This same kind of development is identifiable among Russian-speakers: scepticism and criticism seem to characterise the Russian-speakers' overall attitudes towards the media (Dougherty and Kaljurand 2015). On the other hand, it is important to note the multiplicity of their responses and strategies.

In fact, the participants draw upon at least three types of strategy with which to manage arising insecurities. The first strategy is to withdraw themselves from the media's sphere of influence by simply limiting their use of it. Alternatively, they claimed that they have stopped consuming certain kinds of media content, such as news bulletins and talk shows, and instead focus on media entertainment, like films, documentaries, music and games. Nadya, the young woman quoted above who described how a distance is building between her and her relatives in Russia, is very concerned about the media's ability to twist reality. She reported considerable changes in her media use. Her initial reaction, when the Euromaidan demonstrations broke out, was to actively search for information. However, during the interview, she explained how this exhausted her and how she later ceased this habit:

*It was really dramatic. I constantly followed it, on telly, live streaming, not just news but what happened in Kiev, on Liberty Square. (...) Russian propaganda is hair-raising. (...) Then I chose to take a break because I got so tired of it all, Ukrainian news. Ukrainian news is also propaganda, just from the other side. It is distorted information, ugly even. It lacks the professionalism of Russians. Now this topic is closed for me. Sometimes I watch Finnish news, but the less the better.*

When asked why she had given up television, Nadya explains:

*Because I was of the opinion that all we see and hear is largely propaganda. It completely 'clogs' your head. It does not allow you to think, and you stop being yourself. Everything is blurred into some kind of nonsense. I do not want that.*

She emphasised her complicated positioning as a Russian-speaking former Ukrainian who 'knows how the situation is in Crimea'. She claims that, although she has never lived in Crimea, she still identifies with the region and this strongly affects her views and her emotional response to the conflict. She feels very distressed by the situation and its portrayal in the media. In her mind, the media draw sharp and mutually exclusive boundaries between people, which some eagerly identify with, even if such categorisations ignore the messy and multi-layered realities of people like herself. Nadya claims that the overarching tendency among people to rely on the media rather than use their own intellect creates feelings of threat and insecurity.

Igor, a young man who has only recently moved to Finland, also claims to be tired of the media's pessimistic and polarised worldviews:

*Because people don't want to all the time, now all the news, it is always so sad, despairing and gloomy. There are always problems. People have enough problems of their own and they don't want to hear about*

*other people's problems. And, recently, in the news, it is all the same, politics, it goes in circles and we are sick of it. And the war goes on, there is nothing new. Time and time again, they tell us that the war goes on.*

Russian-speakers typically mitigate such perceived risks by regulating their own use of the media. For many, greater security is achieved by distancing themselves from the media and the conflict although, in the current mediatised world, this is proving difficult. Yana, a middle-aged woman who lives in Eastern Finland, explains how her colleagues interrogated her on Russian politics and how she tries to avoid such situations by focusing on the positive:

*It's hard. I don't want to talk politics. For example, at work a woman asked me: 'Well, did you go to see Putin? Did you go to Russia?'. I answered that I did. 'Well, how is Putin doing?'. I didn't want to reply. I thought that perhaps it would be better to leave all politics aside because, if something bad happens and they know I come from Russia, they think that I am just the same as some other woman who has done something bad. I replied: 'Let's talk about children, nature, culture, travels'. It's hard. I don't have a recipe for how to survive. I try to think that, in the world, here in Finland as well as in Russia, there are good events and bad events and people. It's hard. I look for something positive that we have there and here [sighs].*

This and other interview quotes illustrate Russian-speakers' reactions towards psychological stress and demonstrate existing strains on their social relations (cf. also McKenna 2018). Furthermore, it shows how people on an individual level work on their identities, for example by presenting themselves as 'good' and 'safe' Russians' who avoid conflicts and political quarrels.

Among the interviewees, there were also those who made a decision to believe in one reality portrayed by one national mass media. They take a strategic stand on their media use by making conscious decisions about what types of media to follow and whom to trust, and often orient towards television and Internet sources from their country of the origin. Participants who rely more on the Russian media space regard it as more reliable and one that is in line with their political views. Olga, who moved to Finland from one of the Baltic States, chooses to consume mainly Russian television as she believes she receives all the information she needs from there:

*My friend makes recommendations. She urges me to visit this or that site. (...) Of course it would be interesting to see what they say there but the thing is that I already get a lot of information from Russian news. And it is not like they only broadcast their own point of view. They broadcast everything. What Sarkozy says, or Obama, what Merkel has got to say. Russian television is enough for me.*

Olga's choice of media reflects her worldview and becomes visible in her political commentary. She argues, for example, that Finland and the European Union suffer much more due to the economic sanctions than Russia. Furthermore, she is worried about the 'refugee crisis' that she finds is threatening Finland and believes that the Finnish government is unable to control the situation. She also claims that refugees are taking advantage of the gullibility of Finns and considers the European Union as too fragmented to handle the crisis in a decisive manner. She trusts that in Russia such issues would be handled more efficiently. These views have been circulated in the Russian media over the years, and they resonate in the minds of those who choose to trust Russian media over any other media source.

Olga is very aware of the dissonance between the Western and the Russian media and considers this largely natural. She believes Finnish people to be misled by their media. In her view, Finns lack the factual knowledge to evaluate the situation at hand in an objective and honest manner:

*What I think about Finland – this really has no negative connotations – but Finns simply view things differently because of the information they receive. They think like that about Russia because that's how they are taught. What can you do if they lack objective knowledge. Although they consider themselves as objective, of course.*

Interestingly, people have a tendency to think that others are more susceptible to media propaganda while they themselves are able to differentiate between what is true and what is false. Therefore, instead of thinking that they are narrowing their views by focusing on one media reality and ignoring the others, these respondents believe that they are searching for a coherent and trustworthy worldview. This said, it seems that this kind of selective media use puts a strain on social relations and social security. With limited knowledge of what those 'on the other side' think, people are more likely to rely on rumours and stereotypes. They are also more likely to seek the company of like-minded people, which could lead to minimising contacts with those who do not share the same worldview.

A third strategy for obtaining security is to opt for transnational and diverse media use in so far as they choose to follow multiple news sources and transnational channels and even contribute, themselves, to discussions in an international arena. These are the participants who consciously expose themselves to different versions of reality in order to construct their own realities by comparing the various media. For them, the world starts to make sense via critical inquiry through which different sources of information are compared. Nikolay, who speaks fluent Finnish, Russian and English, follows several media and on-line sources. He attempts to distance himself from simplified worldviews that, in his opinion, are dominant in any national media. He aims to build his own 'truth' by comparing information provided by different media:

*I have started to pay more attention to Russian language media just because the Finnish media accuses Russia of everything, and the Russian media accuses the West of everything. I read them both and then I make my own mind up somewhere in the middle. Sometimes if I read an interesting piece of news I also check how the different world media comment on it. (...) Usually, if I check, yes, maybe the Guardian is among them, or the Washington Post or the Financial Times. Sometimes I also check the financial pages, just to see what they say about Russia. (...) My advice is to read as many sources as you can, in different languages and to be critical towards everything. That is the only thing I can really recommend.*

Following Robins (2003), this strategy for coming to terms with a stressful media environment could be called a 'productive sense of distance' which, he claims, is typical of critical thinkers who mediate between the different media and worldviews. According to Robins, this capability makes it easier for people to ask questions and create new thinking instead of simply repeating ready-made answers that any media tends to produce and resonate with. These critical, yet not cynical, media users seek social security by sustaining and creating contacts and communication with a variety of thinkers and worldviews. They could play an important role as mediators in situations where people's emotional and social security are at stake.

## Conclusions

Numerous studies have documented how the media marginalises, denigrates and even demonises certain social groups, positioning them as stigmatised outcasts and depositing them into categories labelled ‘social problems’, ‘unworthy’, or ‘dangerous’ (Cottle 2007; Slade 2010). As Cottle (2007: 34–35) explains, this storyline has been rehearsed repeatedly in respect of various social groups. While not denying the damaging consequences of such narratives for the relationship between the dominant majority and the minorities that are subjected to such distorting representations, I claim that there is a need to shift the focus towards the effects of media representations and media use of minority communities themselves. In addition to research on securitisation, there is a need for scholarly work that details the consequences of this discourse on minorities from their own perspectives. We need to bring to the fore the understandings and views of those who experience the effects of securitisation first hand.

In the post-Soviet space, individuals and families have migrated both internally and overseas. They have become multicultural, multinational and transnational. Even though research has identified vulnerabilities associated with transnational living (Lulle and Jurkane-Hobein 2017; Varjonen, Arnold and Jasinskaja-Lahti 2013), the transnational mobility of Russian-speakers has usually been regarded as a positive phenomenon. In the current political climate, however, Russian-speakers living in the EU come into view as a group that faces the need to come to terms with the politicisation and securitisation of their identities.

Following Frölich (2016: 30), I find it important to broaden the classical emphasis of security and communication studies on the ‘military’ and ‘war activities’ toward the social and societal aspects of threat and security. This article, therefore, focused on the negotiations around social security among Finnish Russian-speakers. It was concerned with the role of the media in relation to Russian-speakers’ national security concerns and their interlinkages with social security. In particular, I explored the ways in which people mitigate risks and produce securities (social, economic, personal and cultural) by drawing on the media and their communicative networks.

In an ideal situation, transnational media use plays an important role in supporting a person’s sense of security (Georgiou 2013; Silverstone 1993). However, this argument presupposes a social reality in which the media is not manipulated to antagonise its audiences. In the case of Finnish Russian-speakers, the antagonisation seems to be taking place. In fact, the interviews with Finnish Russian-speakers revealed that the different media play on people’s fears and emotions by portraying a polarised view of current affairs, creating insecurity on many levels. Participants often describe the Russian media as propaganda. The Finnish media is considered less propagandist but, at the same time, the participants argue that, in the Western media, Russia and Russian people are consistently portrayed in a negative light. The people we interviewed were thus not able to relate to the image of Russian people which they find in the Finnish media, which then diminishes their trust in Finnish society and leads them to question their own position within it. This polarisation also makes it harder for them to rely on traditional communities of care and informal networks of support, as other people – Finnish and Russian-speakers alike – are perceived as being (potentially) positioned in another ‘camp’.

The politicisation of the mediascapes is linked with (although not limited to) the military conflict in Ukraine, which is commonly regarded as an ‘information war’ as much as a conventional one (Hutchings and Szostek 2015: 184). As Kuntsman (2010: 300) explains, in conflict situations both online and offline violence ‘reverberate between spaces, bodies and psyches’, which may produce effects that can also intensify the experiences of violence among those who participate in warfare from a distance. During our interviews, Finnish Russian-speakers described their symptoms of emotional and social stress and explained how families and friendships are ruptured due to conflicting media orientations and worldviews.

This means that, even though Finland is considered to be one of the safest countries in the world and the Nordic welfare model as one of the most inclusive, the Russian-speakers interviewed for this study demonstrate a level of distrust in Russia, in Finnish society and even in their closest relationships. It seems that material security, or at least a basic social security which, in the Finnish context, is attainable to anyone with a permanent residence status, still does not guarantee social security in broader terms for Russian-speakers (see also Heino and Veistilä 2015). Social insecurity exists at the level of Finnish society, and in relation to Russia and the personal networks of Finnish Russian-speakers. The identities of these latter and their sense of security are both transcended and reinforced by their individual media choices and their exposure to the mixture of local, national and transnational media.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Because of the sensitivity of the research topic and the small size and connectedness of the Russian-speaking population in Finland, I have altered small details of interview quotes – such as place names – in order to protect the identity of my interviewees. All participants were therefore assigned, and are *referred to by, pseudonyms*.

<sup>2</sup> The majority of interviews were conducted in Russian by Daria Kettunen. Two were conducted in Finnish and one was conducted by Daria Kettunen, Olga Davydova-Minguet and Tiina Sotkasiira. They were audio-recorded and transcribed by Daria Kettunen and Mariia Ponomareva and the citations translated from Russian into English by Tiina Sotkasiira.

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