"WE SHOULD STOP THE ISLAMISATION OF EUROPE!": STUDYING ANTI-IMMIGRANT ATTITUDES AMONG RUSSIAN-SPEAKING INTERNET USERS IN GERMANY

By

Liliia Sablina

Submitted to

Central European University

Nationalism Studies Program

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Advisor: Szabolcs Pogonyi

Budapest, Hungary

2019

ABSTRACT

Starting from 2015, some of the Russian-speaking residents in Germany have expressed their anti-refugee attitudes in the form of rallies and rising voting support for the right-wing populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). Due to the absence of social cues, unlimited space, immediate responses and minimal censorship, online platforms for communication have reflected the offline mobilization and became the major platforms for the spreadability of discriminative rhetoric. The present thesis investigates why Russian-speaking internet users residing in Germany justify anti-refugee discourse and how they construct the notion of the "others." Based on the netnographic analysis of the chosen online discussions and conducted interviews with its members, the present work argues that with the appearance of the new "others," Russian-speaking migrants have redefined their symbolic boundaries in order to draw the line between the new coming "*stinky migrants*"[1] and themselves – people with migrant background. In many ways, participants of the analyzed discussions employed the politicized civilizational rhetoric that allowed them to redefine existing categorizations. The present research explores, for the first time, the reasons lying behind the online populist activity of Russian-speaking residents in Germany.

---

[1] *Destroyed Europe*. Germany in Russian. URL: www.germany.ru (Access date: 25.05.2019)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF FIGURES

---

[2] Generated with http://xn--80abe5adcqeb2a.xn--p1ai/. To build the graph, I used the commentaries from the discussion "Are you for or against refugees?" (URL: https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall)

[3] Die AfD schaltet nun offenbar auch Wahlwerbung im russischen Staatsfernsehen. URL: https://www.buzzfeed.com/de/marcusengert/die-afd-schaltet-nun-offenbar-auch-wahlwerbung-im (Access date: 20.05.2019)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. How does the mobilization start?

At the end of January 2016, around 50,000 Russian-speakers came to the streets in different parts of Germany to protest against the new coming wave of refugees.[4] The majority of protesters had received the mobilizing messages through the online messenger WhatsApp. One of such messages stated:

> "ATTENTION! THIS IS WAR!
> A 13-years-old girl was raped in Berlin. The corrupt elite and its faithful dogs "polizei" are trying to hide this fact from us. The press has been silent for a week.
> I ADDRESS ALL THE RUSSIAN-SPEAKING PEOPLE IN GERMANY! ON SUNDAY, 24.01.2016, FROM 14.00-16.00, LET'S GO TOGETHER TO THE MAIN SQUARES OR THE TOWNHOUSES OF ALL SETTLEMENTS IN GERMANY, ALL TOGETHER, FROM SMALL TO LARGE, AT THE SAME TIME.
> THOSE WHO IGNORE IT, LET THEM CONSIDER THIS RAPE ON THEIR CONSCIENCE. THIS IS THE FIRST PEACEFUL WARNING TO THE AUTHORITIES.
> If we do not unite and defend Germany, we will be squeezed down like rats, each of us in our holes. Repost and share (PRESS SHARE), so everyone knows about it!"[5]

The reason for a seemingly sudden mobilization of the Russian speakers in Germany was a viral story of a 13 years-old girl Lisa from Berlin who was born in the family of ethnic German resettlers from the former Soviet Union. Lisa was declared missing on January 11th, and 30 hours later, she returned home half-naked and blamed three "migrants of Arab origin" in raping and kidnapping.[67] However, the official expertise launched by the Berlin police concluded that there were no signs of sexual abuse. After the interrogation, Lisa confessed that she made the whole story up as an excuse to skip classes that day.[8]

The so-called "Lisa case" caused an unpredictable reaction of the Russian-speaking residents in Germany – many did not believe the results of the official investigation and

---

[4] Nikolai Mitrokhin, "«Sluchai Devochki Lizy»: Russkoiazychnye Storonniki Putina v Germanii i Nemetskii Pravyi Radikalizm," *Neprikosnovennyi Zapas* 3 (2017): 132–46.
[5] Mitrokhin.
[6] Mitrokhin.
[7]"Russian world" came to Berlin. URL: https://meduza.io/feature/2016/01/25/russkiy-mir-prishel-v-berlin (Access date: 25.05.2019)
[8] Ibid.

accused German police of falsifying the documents.[9] At the same time, the official Russian state media used the case to indicate the failure of German migration policy.[10] The "Lisa case" ideally suited the state propaganda that since Russia's intervention in the Syrian conflict has tended to marginalize refugees as illegal, uneducated and "culturally alien" to European culture (Gabdulhakov 2016). The rallies in support for Lisa became the first visual representations of common prejudices against new-coming refugees that some Russian-speaking residents in Germany tend to share.

There is no definite answer to the question of why the fictitious "Lisa case" had triggered self-mobilization practices of the residents that resulted in the mass rallies. In her research on Romanian diaspora in Spain, Ruxandra Trandafoiu claims that perceived discrimination towards one of the group members could cause political mobilization of the minority group.[11] This type of mobilization requires shared self-identification among diaspora members. However, in the case of the Russian-speaking residents in Germany, it is hard to talk about any homogeneous social group. The majority of all the Russian-speaking residents constitute ethnic German resettlers who came to the country in the 1990s as a part of the repatriation program aimed at offering citizenship for those who could prove their ethnic German origin. According to the official statistics, 700 622 repatriates from Russia[12] and 1.3 million from Kazakhstan[13] entered Germany between 1990 and 2011. Besides, by 2016, more than 245 000 economic migrants from Russia were registered.[14] Another large group of

---

[9] Ibid.

[10] Mitrokhin, "«Sluchai Devochki Lizy»: Russkoiazychnye Storonniki Putina v Germanii i Nemetskii Pravyi Radikalizm."

[11] Ruxandra Trandafoiu, *Diaspora Online: Identity Politics and Romanian Migrants* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).

[12] (Spät-)Aussiedler.URL:http://www.bpb.de/nachschlagen/zahlen-und-fakten/soziale-situation-in-deutschland/61643/aussiedler (Access date: 21.12.2018)

[13] "Recruiting for the Nation: Post-Soviet Transnational Migrants in Germany and Kazakhstan," in *Rebuilding Identities. Pathways to Reform in Post-Soviet Siberia.* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2005), 153–72.

[14] Ausländische Bevölkerung nach Geschlecht und ausgewählten Staatsangehörigkeiten. URL: https://www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/GesellschaftStaat/Bevoelkerung/MigrationIntegration/Auslaendische Bevolkerung/Tabellen/Geschlecht.html;jsessionid=6C952B0A145A80BBE21195460CF72323.InternetLive1 (Access date: 21.12.2017)

migrants from the post-Soviet space constitutes "Soviet Jews" – almost 200 000 entered Germany in the period between 1991 and 2005.[15] By 2017, more than 300 000 Ukrainian citizens registered in Germany as permanent citizens.[16] Overall, approximately 4 – 5 000 000 post-Soviet migrants live in Germany, share the Russian language and some cultural practices from the Soviet past.[17]

Upon their arrival in Germany, all the groups had different experiences of integration. For example, in the case of the ethnic resettlers, the act of migration had a symbolic meaning and repatriation was perceived as a way to become "real Germans."[18] At the same time, many faced with structural discrimination caused by the lack of German knowledge and a significant gap in cultural practices. Despite sharing the same "ethnicity," local Germans referred to post-Soviet resettlers as "Russians" regardless of their origin.[19] The group of Jewish resettlers had a similar experience when the local Jewish communities did not accept them because of the differences in religious practices.[20] There is not much written regarding self-identification of post-Soviet economic migrants, but one can assume that their practices differed significantly from the ethnic resettlers. For this reason, the present research tries to avoid any generalizations regarding the above-mentioned Russian-speaking migrant groups in Germany. Instead, it focuses on people who express discriminative rhetoric towards new-coming refugees, irrespective of their country of immigration.

---

[15] Germany's Jews. Latkes and Vodka. Immigrants from the former Soviet Union are transforming Jewish life in Germany. URL: http://www.economist.com/node/10424406 (Access date: 28.12.2018)
[16] Bevölkerung in Privathaushalten nach Migrationshintergrund im engeren Sinne nach ausgewählten Herkunftsländern. URL: https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Migration-Integration/Tabellen/migrationshintergrund-staatsangehoerigkeit-staaten.html. Access date: 09-05-2018
[17] Bevölkerung in Privathaushalten nach Migrationshintergrund im engeren Sinne nach ausgewählten Herkunftsländern. URL: https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Migration-Integration/Tabellen/migrationshintergrund-staatsangehoerigkeit-staaten.html. Access date: 09-05-2018
[18] Katharina Meng and Ekaterina Protassova, "Young Russian-German Adults 20 Years after Their Repatriation to Germany," in *Integration, Identity and Language Maintenance in Young Immigrants. Russian Germans or German Russians* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2017), 159–97.
[19] Darieva, "Recruiting for the Nation: Post-Soviet Transnational Migrants in Germany and Kazakhstan."
[20] Barbara Dietz and Pavel Polian, "The Jewish Emigration from the Former Soviet Union to Germany," *International Migration* 40, no. 2 (June 2002): 29–48.

Besides migrant experience, what unites these people? Why (and how) did they start to share the same xenophobic views? In order to answer these questions, I would like to come back to the "Lisa case." Back in 2016, the major platforms for spreading information about the rallies were social networking sites (SNS). Members of the local Russian-language online groups ("Russians in Germany," "Germany in Russian," etc.) started to distribute "truthful information" about the upcoming demonstrations. Due to perceived privacy, minimal censorship and immediate reaction from other users,[21] the Russian-language SNS have mirrored the offline mobilization. Many Russian-speaking users have started to put their concerns about the "refugee crisis," dissatisfaction with democracy, as well as current populist shift on the online discussions.[22] Thus, by sharing the same media space and practices of self-mediation, some Russian-speaking migrants obtained a shared vision on the "refugee problem."

The protests in support for Lisa ended at the beginning of February 2016. However, social mobilization launched by the case did not end in that year. The Russian-language SNS in Germany have remained the major platforms for political discussions and reproduction of the user-generated reflections on right-wing populism and Islamophobia. In many ways, it had an impact on the Bundestag elections of 2017 when mobilized ethnic German resettlers increasingly voted for the right-wing populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD).[23] Many major media sources paid attention to the fact[24] that during its election campaign the

---

[21] Yair Amichai-Hamburger, ed., *The Social Net. Understanding Our Online Behaviour* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Tamara Trost and Nikola Kovacevic, "Football, Hooliganism and Nationalism: The Reaction to Serbia's Gay Parade in Reader Commentary Online," *Sport in Society* 16, no. 8 (2013): 1054–76.

[22] Amichai-Hamburger, *The Social Net. Understanding Our Online Behaviour*; Trost and Kovacevic, "Football, Hooliganism and Nationalism: The Reaction to Serbia's Gay Parade in Reader Commentary Online."

[23] Dennis Spies and Achim Goerres, "How Did Immigrant Voters Vote at the 2017 Bundestag Election? First Results from the Immigrant German Election Study (IMGES)" (Universität zu Köln, March 2018).

[24] See: *How Russian Voters Fueled the Rise of Germany's Far-Right*. URL: "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences," *Symbolic Boundaries*, no. 28 (2002): 168. (Access date: 21.12.2018); *Putin Has a Really Big Trojan Horse in Germany*. URL: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-05-02/putin-s-trojan-horse-for-merkel-is-packed-with-russian-tv-fans (Access date: 20.12.2018); *How Germany's Russian minority could boost far-right*. URL: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/22/how-germanys-russian-minority-could-boost-far-right (Access date: 24.05.2018); *Russian 'botnet' promotes far-right messages in German election*.

AfD targeted Russian-Germans as potential electorate by posting agitation posters and gathering party meetings in Russian, thus attracting the attention of returnees.[25] Many even joined the party and started to participate in local elections. On his page on the official website, one of the candidates Eugen Schmidt states: "My main aim is to involve Germans from the former Soviet Union as natural electorate for the AfD."[26]

To sum up, after the pro-Lisa rallies in 2016, the Russian-language SNS in Germany have become the major platforms for political discussions and reproduction of the user-generated reflections on right-wing populism and Islamophobia. As was observed by Simon Hill,[27] after the end of the "active mode," mobilization comes back on the internet and takes the form of shared views and discourses among members of online social groups. As a result, the online pro-Lisa rallies transformed into offline discussions about the "refugee crisis" and its negative impact on German culture, forming the socially acceptable negative stigmas.

1.2. Research aims

The present research aims at answering the general question of why some Russian-speaking migrants in Germany express extreme anti-refugee views. It also focuses on discursive practices of marginalization that migrants employ in the Russian-language online space in order to construct the notion of the "others." In order to do it, I apply the concept of symbolic boundaries construction. Therefore, the analysis focuses on how the Russian-speaking minorities in Germany reconstruct their perception of symbolic boundaries in a situation when the right-wing populist actors redefine the new "others" in "civilizational" terms.[28] In that case, Islamophobic discourse plays a role of "inclusionary category" that leads

---

URL: https://www.politico.eu/article/russian-botnet-promotes-far-right-messages-in-german-election/(Access date: 25.05.2019)

[25] For example, see: URL: http://politolog.net/novosti-mira/migranty-i-sploshnye-izvrashheniya-ultrapravye-v-germanii-ispolzovali-russkoyazychnuyu-agitaciyu-foto/ (Access date: 25.05.2019)

[26] *Eugen Schmidt*. URL: https://www.AfD.de/person/eugen-schmidt/ (Access date: 25.05.2019)

[27] *Digital Revolutions: Activism in the Internet Age* (New Internationalist Publications Ltd, 2013).

[28] Rogers Brubaker, "Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 8 (2017): 1191–1226.

to a reconsideration of previous inter-group categorizations. This paper considers how the reconstruction of symbolic boundaries could take place in SNS and what the role of the user-generated content in mirroring and spreading Islamophobic attitudes is. The discriminative far-right populist views allow migrants to redefine the senses of identity and belonging in order to include themselves in the category of "majority." Due to the absence of social cues, unlimited space, immediate responses and minimal censorship, the online groups present for minorities a fertile ground to co-produce discriminative views through the user-generated reflections.

The present research investigates, for the first time, the reasons lying behind the online populist activity of Russian-speaking residents in Germany. It is hoped that this work will contribute to a deeper understanding of several interconnected research areas: the spread of the right-wing populism through online rhetoric, reconstruction of symbolic boundaries among migrant groups, nature of anti-refugee attitudes.

The overall structure of the thesis takes the form of five chapters. In Chapter Two, I consider theoretical dimensions of the research and review the literature on the subject. Since the current thesis lies at the intersection of several sub-topics, I have divided the literature into the following categories: symbolic and social boundaries, specificities of online communication, right-wing populism among migrant groups, migrant mobilization. This division allowed me to construct a comprehensive theoretical framework as well as formulate multiple arguments. Chapter Three is concerned with the methodology used for this study. Since the thesis uses a qualitative approach, I will describe which types of online platforms I have analyzed and the number of conducted interviews. This chapter also contains a brief description of the study limitations. Chapter Four considers the specificities of the Russian-language internet space. Chapter Five is divided thematically and analyses the discursive features of "othering" that are embedded in the everyday discourse of the Russian-speaking

residents in Germany. In this section, I present mainly the empirical results of netnographic analysis of the chosen SNS. I finish the thesis with the conclusion that logically presents the primary outcomes of the presented work.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter is divided into three main parts consequently dealing with the major theoretical assumptions taken in the present research. The first section focuses on the concept of symbolic boundaries that serves as a general theoretical framework for the analysis of the "othering" process among Russian-speaking residents in Germany. The second section considers cultural and social factors that contribute to the radicalization of minorities, including cultural and political assimilation, dual identification and right-wing populist mobilization. The last part of this chapter reviews the specificities of online interactions that hold predisposition for the spread of homogenized discriminative rhetoric. Based on the relevant literature, each part contains argumentation that would be considered throughout the empirical chapters of the present thesis.

2.1. Symbolic and social boundaries

At the core of anti-immigrant attitudes lies the group perception of symbolic boundaries[29] that allow members of the social group to construct the internal division on "us" and "them." This is highly connected with the theory of self-categorization that argues that people act in different social situations according to their perception of similarity with other members of the same group.[30] The origin of the concept of symbolic boundaries goes back to the works of Emile Durkheim, who considered religious rituals as a form of expressions of differences between sacred and profane,[31] and Max Weber, who described the mechanisms of social inequality.[32] In 1969 Fredrik Barth published his influential book "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference" where he argued that ethnic groups regard specific aspects of cultural practices as significant and ascribe them to

---

[29] Jens Hainmueller and Daniel Hopkins, "Public Attitudes toward Immigration," *Annual Review of Political Science* 17 (2014): 19.

[30] John Turner, *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory* (Basil Blackwell, 1987).

[31] *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (The Free Press, 1995).

[32] *Economy and Society* (University of California Press, 1978).

themselves and other groups[33] consequently creating dichotomized views on "us" and "them." The internal boundaries, therefore, present to be changeable categories that are used for self-identification practices and the construction of the sense of belonging.

Michéle Lamont and Virág Molnár define symbolic boundaries as "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space."[34] Hence, symbolic boundaries could be used by groups as a tool to acquire certain statuses or construct a criterion for membership. The abovementioned notion closely correlates with social boundaries, that are defined as "objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to an unequal distribution of resources and social opportunities."[35] As was noted by Stefan Lund, in some cases, symbolic boundaries could produce social boundaries, blur the ethnic identity, change the composition of cultural identities as well as solidarity practices of the group.[36]

In many ways, symbolic and social boundaries are subjected to the constant process of reshaping.[37] According to Charles Tilly, the change in boundaries perception could facilitate mobilization in the form of social movements and transform the form of collective violence.[38] The mobilization of the Russian-speakers in Germany could, therefore, be explained by what Tilly calls "site transfer" and "relocation" – the ability of social groups to recategorize themselves in the system of social relations thus transforming the symbolic and social boundaries.[39] Hence, mobilization could occur in a situation when resident minorities face with the new commonly marginalized "others" pretending over the same symbolic and economic resources of the state. The discriminative radical discourse can represent a reflection of the boundary reshaping process.

---

[33] *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Waveland Press, 1969).
[34] "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences," *Symbolic Boundaries*, no. 28 (2002): 168.
[35] Lamont and Molnár, "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences."
[36] *School Choice, Ethnic Divisions, and Symbolic Boundaries* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
[37] "Social Boundary Mechanisms," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 34, no. 2 (2004): 211–36.
[38] Tilly, 225.
[39] Tilly, "Social Boundary Mechanisms."

2.2. Factors for radicalization

2.2.1. Dual identification

So far, there has been little discussion about the reasons why migrant communities could support anti-immigrant views. Some scholars consider hybrid identification[40] or dual identity[41] as the main factors influencing on migrant conflict potential and support for discriminative actions. Dual identification contributes to migrants' adaptation into the host society and the development of socio-psychological difficulties when some of the host and home cultural practices are incompatible.[42] Consequently, many of the authors argue that migration causes stratification of identities that leads to a creation of potential predispositions for violent discourse and ethnic conflicts between several diasporic groups (see the works of Fiona Adamson,[43] Maria Koinova,[44] Bahar Baser [45] and Abdulkadir Osman Farah.)[46]

In this regard, due to a high level of dual-identification, Russian-speaking residents in Germany had a predisposition for political mobilization. In 2013 Simon Bernd, Frank Reichert and Olga Grabow conducted the comparative qualitative research investigating dual identification of Turkish and Russian-speaking students in Germany.[47] The authors came to conclusion that Russian-speaking residents have a higher level of perceived incompatibility that presumably could lead to sympathy towards right-wing populist ideology.

---

[40] Jennifer Brinkerhoff, *Digital Diasporas: Idenitty and Transnational Engagement* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[41] Bernd Simon, Frank Reichert, and Olga Grabow, "When Dual Identity Becomes a Liability: Identity and Political Radicalism Among Migrants," *Psychological Science* 24, no. 3 (2013): 251–57.

[42] Simon, Reichert, and Grabow.

[43] "Constructing the Diaspora: Diaspora Identity Politics and Transnational Social Movements," 2008, https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/7071339/diasp_identity_politics_isa08_proceeding_251176 .pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1526990973&Signature=aNxaBUoYKM0H 9lrA4dHLssDktMw%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DConstructing_the_diaspora_diaspora_ident.pdf.

[44] "Sustained vs Episodic Mobilization among Conflict-Generated Diasporas," *International Political Science Review* 37, no. 5 (2015): 500–516.

[45] *Diasporas and Homeland Conflicts: A Comparative Perspective* (Routledge, 2016).

[46] *Transnationalism and Civic Engagement* (Adonis and Abbey Publishing House, 2012).

[47] "When Dual Identity Becomes a Liability: Identity and Political Radicalism Among Migrants."

2.2.2. Cultural and political integration

The lack of cultural and political integration is often considered to be as one of the factors influencing on minority radicalization,[48] as well as migrant mobilization.[49] Koomen and Van der Pligt also name existing prejudices, economic deprivation and group isolation as factors that could lead to polarization of minority views.[50] Therefore, cultural and structural integration present to be essential factors in the formation of the sense of belonging among migrant groups.

2.2.3. Right-wing populist mobilization

Another essential factor that needs to be taken into consideration is the right-wing populist mobilization that could have a significant impact on the formation of shared views among the Russian-language minorities in Germany. At the core of this work lies the assumption that the affordances of social media[51] and the growing number of platforms for self-mediation[52] play a significant role in gaining pro-populist support[53] and mobilization of the groups. Moffitt even considers the media to be an integral part of the "global rise of populism" that, together with the crisis, provides a "stage" for populist performances.[54] Throughout the present thesis I use the Cas Mudde's definition of populism as a "thin-centered ideology" [55] in the center of which lies multi-dimensional dichotomies between "the people" and "the others" (that are often defined in ethno-nationalist terms) as well as between

---

[48] Sadeq Rahimi and Raissa Graumans, "Reconsidering the Relationship Between Integration and Radicalization," *Journal for Deradicalization*, no. 5 (2015): 28–62.

[49] Willem Koomen and Joop Van der Pligt, *The Psychology of Radicalization and Terrorism* (Routlege, 2016).

[50] Koomen and Van der Pligt.

[51] A. Bucher and A. Helmond, "The Affordances of Social Media Platforms," in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media* (Sage Publications, 2018), 233–52.

[52] Lilie Chouliaraki, *Self-Mediation. New Media, Citizenship and Civil Selves* (London: Routledge, 2017).

[53] Gianpietro Mazzoleni, "Populism and the Media," in *Twenty First Century Populism* (Springer, 2008), 49–64; Christian Fuchs, "Racism, Nationalism and Right-Wing Extremism Online: The Austrian Presidential Election 2016 on Facebook," in *Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism* (University of Wesminster Press, 2018).

[54] Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism : Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford, Calif. : Stanford University Press, 2016, 2016).

[55] Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 6.

"the people" and "the corrupt elite." In many ways, the theoretical framework is grounded in the studies of interconnections between populist mobilization and media.[56]

The populist mobilization, therefore, presents to be a political practice aims at animating political support.[57] The anti-immigrant statements are actively used by the right-wing parties to formulate polarized views among its potential voters. According to Rogers Brubaker,[58] in recent years, the national populisms of Northern and Western Europe have started to construct the "others" in broader civilizational terms. Brubaker claims that current political shift from nationalism to "civilizationism" describes Islam as a new threat, thus building opposition between secular Christianism and "anti-civilized" Islam. The influence of civilizational discourse constructed by the right-wing actors could be observed on the example of the Russian-language SNS as well.

The effect of right-wing populist mobilization on the Russian-speaking residents in Germany could be observed on the example of changing voting practices of ethnic repatriates – the biggest migrant voting minority in Germany. According to Dennis Spies,[59] many repatriates have changed their voting preferences from supporting the Christian Democrats to vote for the AfD. Some authors[60] [61] even explain it with the Kremlin' European policy that is aiming to implement the anti-refugee discriminative discourse among Russian-speaking communities abroad in order to re-enter the European geopolitical space.

---

[56] Robert Jansen, "Populist Mobilization: A New Theoretical Approach to Populism," *Sociological Theory* 29, no. 2 (2011): 75–96; Brubaker, "Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective"; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*.
[57] "Populist Mobilization: A New Theoretical Approach to Populism."
[58] "Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective."
[59] "The Electoral Supporter Base of the Alternative for Germany," *Swiss Political Science Review*, 2017; "How Did Immigrant Voters Vote at the 2017 Bundestag Election? First Results from the Immigrant German Election Study (IMGES)."
[60] "Redefining Europe: Russia and the 2015 Refugee Crisis," *Geopolitics* 23, no. 4 (2018): 823–48.
[61] "«Sluchai Devochki Lizy»: Russkoiazychnye Storonniki Putina v Germanii i Nemetskii Pravyi Radikalizm."

2.2.4. Migrant mobilization

So far, very little attention has been paid to the anti-refugee mobilization of migrant minorities. In general, the literature on migrant mobilization mainly concerns with the home state' mobilizing policies through notions of class, ethnicity and transnational politics.[62] Migrant mobilization in relation to "refugee crisis" is often considered in the framework of positive social movements that appear as a reaction to rising Islamophobia and prejudices against new-coming groups.[63] The anti-refugee mobilization, therefore, relates only to the attitudes of the majority. [64] This indicates a significant gap in the literature that does not consider anti-refugee mobilization among groups with a migrant background.

2.3. The specificities of online communication

The specificities of online communication also hold predisposition for the spread of discriminative rhetoric. Due to perceived technical and social anonymity, lack of normative limitations and "contact with similar others," [65] many users tend to express aggressive views online and participate in discriminative discussions. It leads to the spread of homogeneous radical rhetoric since internet users who join online discussions or groups that advocate ethnic hatred or radical populist views are more likely to start redistributing the same discourse.[66] The perceived legitimacy of internet posts leads to the spread of discriminative views among silent members of such discussions. This type of rhetoric could be easily spread on SNS due to its focus on the fast redistribution of information. [67] [68]

---

[62] Davide Pero and John Solomos, eds., *Migrant Politics and Mobilization: Exclusion, Engagements, Incorporation*, vol. 33 (Ethnic and Racial Studies, 2010).

[63] Ariane Chebel d'Appollonia, *The Ends of European Colonial Empires. Cases and Comparisons. Migrant Mobilization and Securitization in the US and Europe. How Does It Feel to Be a Threat?* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[64] "Europeans, Shut the Borders! Anti-Refugee Mobilization in Italy and France," in *Solidarity Mobilizations in the 'Refugee Crisis'' : Contentious Moves* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 271–99.

[65] Neil Malamuth, Daniel Linz, and René Weber, "The Internet and Aggression: Motivation, Disinhibitory, and Opportunity Aspects," in *The Social Net* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 120–43.

[66] Amichai-Hamburger, *The Social Net. Understanding Our Online Behaviour*.

[67] "Internet and Personality," in *The Social Net* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 1–21.

[68] Kimberly Kahn, Katherine Spencer, and Jack Glaser, "Online Prejudice and Discrimination: From Dating to Hating," in *The Social Net* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 201–20.

This also coincides with the general trend of normalization of Islamophobic discourse on SNS – as was observed by Andre Oboler, Facebook plays a significant role in spreading anti-Muslim attitudes since the website's policy does not mark most of the discriminative messages as "offensive" giving way for spreading prejudices.[69] In their study on anti-Gypsies online commentaries, Rowe Lottie and Simon Goodman[70] proved the importance of the bottom-up perspective on the issues of social prejudices by claiming that online space gives a necessary platform for considering uncensored views on existing stereotypes.

Some scholars have also argued that with the spread of wireless communication migrant groups get more opportunities to represent their aspirational national identity and, therefore, to symbolically strengthen it. In 2011 Robert Saunders continued this line of research by claiming that the internet plays a significant role in preserving identities of marginalized national minorities.[71] The ability of migrant groups to create stable online interconnections with home state and former co-patriots attracted some scholar interest. The phenomenon received the name "digital" or "online diaspora." Victoria Bernal was among the first scholars who traced interconnections between cyberspace and representation of diasporic identities. In her article published in 2006 "Diaspora, cyberspace and political imagination: the Eritrean diaspora online"[72] Bernal argues that in the case of Eritrean diasporic community cyber communication plays a role of a "transnational public sphere" designed explicitly for reproducing public debates on culture, democracy, identity and politics. Also, the internet could be used by migrant groups as a platform for organizing and expressing political protests.[73]

[69] Andre Oboler, "The Normalisation of Islamophobia through Social Media: Facebook," in *Islamophobia in Cyberspace. Hate Crimes Go Viral* (Routledge, 2016), 42–43.
[70] "'A Stinking Filthy Race of People Inbred with Criminality': Discourse Analysis of Prejudicial Talk about Gypsies in Discussion Forums," *Romani Studies* 24, no. 1 (2014): 25–42.
[71] *Ethnopolitics in Cyberspace* (Lexington Books, 2011).
[72] "Diaspora, Cyberspace and Political Imagination: The Eritrean Diaspora Online," *Global Networks* 6, no. 2 (2006): 161–79.
[73] Andoni Alonso and Pedro Oiarzabal, eds., *Diasporas in the New Media Age. Identity, Politics and Community* (University of Nevada Press, 2010).

SNS allow migrant diasporas to connect with their ethnic kin state, therefore, creating a unified transnational online space. In her book "Diaspora Online. Identity Politics and Romanian Migrants" Ruxandra Trandafoiu came to the same conclusions by analyzing Romanian diasporic communities in Spain, Italy and the UK. According to Trandafoiu, cyber communications have a predisposition for political mobilization that could be activated in a case when one member of the imagined community gets discriminated.[74] In some cases, the cyberspace could act as an alternative to nation states, as it does in the case of Kurdish diaspora,[75] thus blurring the boundaries of the nation states that are no longer represented by its population residing inside the geographical entities.[76]

The study of the Russian-speaking online platforms could not be done without considering the development and specificities of the Russian-speaking internet, the so-called "Runet." One of the very few works on the matter is the book "Digital Russia. The language, culture and politics of new media communication" edited by Michael Gorham, Ingunn Lunde and Martin Paulsen. The main aim of the special issue was to consider the ways how the development of contemporary digital communication could shape linguistic practices in contemporary Russia. The authors, therefore, trace the evolution of the web-based communication practices. For example, Vlad Strukov[77] and Natalya Konradova and Henrike Schmidt[78] argue that "country Runet" presents to be a specific phenomenon with the roots back in the 1990s when after the dissolution of the Soviet Union people suddenly got access to a virtual communication with the other parts of the world. At the same time, the first Russian-language websites were mainly initiated by the Russian migrants who left the USSR

---

[74] Trandafoiu, *Diaspora Online: Identity Politics and Romanian Migrants*.

[75] *Kurdish Diaspora Online: From Imagined Community to Managing Communities* (Springer, 2016).

[76] Alaja Sahoo and Johannes De Kruijf, eds., *Indian Transnationalism Online. New Perspectives on Diaspora* (Routledge, 2016).

[77] "The (Im)Personal Connection: Computational Systems and (Post-)Soviet Cultural History," in *Digital Russia. The Langiage, Culture and Politics of New Media Communication* (Routledge, 2016), 11–34.

[78] "From the Utopia of Autonomy to a Political Battlefield: Towards a History of the 'Russian Internet,'" in *Digital Russia* (Routledge, 2016), 34–55.

in the 1980s-1990s and sought for retaining lost contacts with relatives and friends. As Konradova claims, the first Russian-speaking websites were explicitly targeting members of the "Russia abroad." However, starting with the strengthening of the Putin's regime in the 2000s, Runet transformed into a strategic battlefield for official authorities and opposition forces. Another article in the issue was written by Tine Rousen and Vera Zvereva[79] who analyzed the specificities of the Russian-language Social Networking Sites (SNS). One of the most important contributions of this article is that it analyses the first Russian-language SNS (such as VK, Odnoklassniki, Facebook) and the different role that platforms play in communicative tasks. The article by Dirk Uffelman[80] investigates the Runet in a context of cyberimperialism. The author claims that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union imperialism was employed in the online sphere by creating linguistic imperialism and online universalism on the post-Soviet space. The book "Russian Social Media Influence. Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe" also contributes to the understanding of contemporary Russia's official policy in maintaining near-abroad revolutions and facilitating online social movements.[81]

2.4. Research gap

As the previous sub-chapters have shown, there is a need to understand how and why migrant groups could be subjected to anti-refugee mobilization, and what is the role of SNS in spreading this type of discriminative rhetoric among migrant groups. In this regard, the present thesis aims to fill the gap in the current literature and consider how the reconstruction of symbolic boundaries could be used by Russian-speaking residents in Germany as a mean to distinguish themselves from the new "others."

---

[79] "Social Network Sites on the Runet: Exploring Social Communication," in *Digital Russia* (Routledge, 2016), 72–88.
[80] "Is There a Russian Cyber Empire?," in *Digital Russia* (Routledge, 2016), 266–85.
[81] Todd Helmus et al., *Russian Social Media Influence. Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe* (RAND Corporation, 2018).

Taken together the main arguments from the abovementioned literature, this thesis focuses on the three major questions:

1) How online discursive features reflect the boundary reshaping process? What categories do users employ in order to construct the notion of the "others"?

2) How is the right-wing populist mobilization reflected in the discursive landscape?

3) What is the role of SNS in forming homogeneous discriminative rhetoric?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Netnographic analysis

In order to understand what lies behind the online discriminative discourse of the Russian-speaking users residing in Germany, I have applied several methodological approaches. To identify how the anti-migrant discourse denies, rationalizes or excuses discrimination of minorities,[82] I analyzed several discussion threads in the three selected online platforms through the lens of netnographic approach. The main aim of netnography is to consider the interaction in social media as a mode of cultural practices' production.[83] The choice of sources relied on several criteria. First, all platforms represent SNS designed for communication among Russian-speaking migrants residing in Germany. Second, all the analyzed threads were created in order to discuss either the "refugee crisis" and the contemporary European migration policies or the political program of the AfD. The last criterion is the number of members who actively participate in the discussions.

The first chosen platform is the forum "Germany in Russian," which has more than 1.1 million registered members and remains one of the largest diasporic forums online. There I looked at several discussions addressing the issues of self-identification, attitudes towards migration and relations to Russia (even though it is not the homeland of all discussion participants). The most popular topic in the forum, which has more than 1,169,470 views, is titled "Destroyed Europe. Refugees in Europe" and starts with the discussion of the growing Muslim population in Europe and economic, cultural and political problems allegedly related to the matter. This message presents one of the most popular opinions in this thread:

"Europe will fall not because of terrorists but because of refugees and economic migrants. Every person who gets to Europe will beat every European man in his fertility. Crowds of barbarians will come and destroy the civilization, will make it something like an Asian-African tumour with its own culture, laws and appearance! (We can say goodbye to all

---

[82] Rowe and Goodman, "'A Stinking Filthy Race of People Inbred with Criminality': Discourse Analysis of Prejudicial Talk about Gypsies in Discussion Forums."
[83] Robert Kozinets, *Netnography: Redefined* (Sage Publications, 2015).

22

blonds, brown-haired, red-haired beauties). New "European" generation is almost here, and it will destroy everything on its path!"[84]

The second most popular thread in the forum is called "AfD is a devil which is not as black as it is painted." This topic was created to discuss the increasing role of the AfD in German politics and contains 9634 comments. At some point, I also used Facebook the group "Куды vadis Deutschland?" (450 participants). It was created by one of the respondents for this research – a 40 years-old ethnic German returnee, who created this group in order to support AfD and discuss where Germany is heading to with the current political regime. In this group, I analyze the comments in several discussion threads on the refugees, as well as the political language (tied to the discourse of the AfD) used in the group.

The format of forum discussions is different from online commentaries and allows to explain views and justify opinions through well-expanded arguments.

Another source is the group "Russians in Germany, Lets Unite!" (8,256 participants)[85] in the Russian social network VKontakte ("in contact"). This group aims to "find your old or new friends, exchange information about Russian concerts, events, activities." A discussion pinned in 2015 and titled "What do you think about the refugees whom Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you for or against them?" contains more than 800 messages, some of which express highly xenophobic attitudes:

"WE LOST GERMANY! THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF THE END!", "We do not need refugees here! [They should] Go away!", "They should come back to their countries and deal with their problems and not destroy Europe!"

Overall, the chosen discussion threads contain more than 21 000 comments. I have started to observe online platforms in December 2017, and my observations have ended in April 2019. For all that time, all of the discussions have been regularly updated. As of May 2019, users are still heatedly arguing about the consequences of the "refugee crisis" of 2015.

---

[84] #ferd1907. URL: https://foren.germany.ru/arch/discus/f/28840970.html (accessdate: 04-10-2018)
[85] Russkie v Germanii: Obiediniamsya!" [Russians in Germany – Let's unite!]. URL: https://vk.com/rusgermany, Access date: 16-05-2019.

All the data was in public access, no special data usage agreement needed.

3.2.<u>Interviews</u>

In order to understand who are the users that tend to support anti-refugee views, I have conducted six semi-structured interviews with participants of the chosen discussions. The conducted interviews aim to understand what the reasons behind the radical online discourse of the Russian-speaking migrants in Germany are. The questionnaire consists of three main sections. The first part includes inquires related to structural/cultural assimilation: his/her migrant experience, everyday language, reflections on life in Germany. The second part of the questionnaire consists of questions regarding attitudes towards the new-coming migrants. The last section includes inquiries in the usage of diasporic platforms and media consumption (including newspapers and television). Overall, the interviews will contribute to the understanding of the anti-migrant discourse since many participants do not fully express their opinions in online discussions. The pilot interview for this research may be seen as an example. The respondent expressed radical, xenophobic discourse online (in the discussion about hijabs):

What can be beautiful in these ugly black furbelows??? Explain to me. I want to puke when I see them, these women in furbelows make me want to punch them in the face, and this is exactly what their husbands do instead of me.[86]

However, during the interview, the respondent mentioned that he was afraid of Muslim migrants since he was Jewish, and, in his opinion, Germany would experience a series of pogroms shortly as the police did not do anything to stop "migrants" from expressing anti-Semitism. The respondent never mentioned these considerations on the online forum, hiding it under aggressive expressions and calls for closing the borders. Due to the sensitivity of the

---

[86] v0id*#1343. https://foren.germany.ru/arch/discus/f/28840970.html (Access date: 25.05.2019)

issue, interviews were carried out via Skype with a turned-off camera, which allowed respondents to maintain the sense of perceived privacy and retain some anonymity.[87]

I have contacted only one respondent directly since his radical views presented particular interest in the current research. For recruiting other respondents, I posted an announcement in the chosen discussion threads stating that I write an MA thesis about Russian-speaking groups residing in Germany. It seems necessary to mention that once I published the call for interviews, I faced with severe discriminative and aggressive messages, such as:

"Female student? Wants to talk to us? You better go and give birth to children than getting a degree. At least you will have some value."[88]

However, this type of reaction later played an important role in forming the respondents' decisions to talk to me. Many mentioned that they felt pity after noticing the negative commentaries under my announcement. All the respondents were first-generation migrants between 40 and 60 years old, predominantly male. The only female respondent immigrated to Germany as a spouse of economic migrant. Three out of six respondents arrived under the ethnic resettlement program (one was Jewish returnee, while the other two – ethnic Germans). One man identified himself as Hungarian from Transcarpathia, who learned the Russian language during the Soviet times. The following table summarizes information about respondents:

Gender	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female

---

[87] Roksana Janghorban, Robab Roudsari, and Ali Taghipour, "Skype Interviewing: The New Generation of Online Synchronous Interview in Qualitative Research," *International Journal of Qualtative Studies on Health and Well-Being*, 2014, 1–2.

[88] AfD is a devil which is not as black as it is painted. URL: https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 20.05.2019)

Home country	Kirgizstan	Kazakhstan	Ukraine/Hungary	Russia	Russia	Russia
Immigration program	Ethnic German repatriate	Ethnic Jewish repatriate	Economic migrant	Spouse of the ethnic German repatriate	Economic migrant	Economic migrant
The year of immigration	1989 (At the age of 15)	1995 (At the age of 15)	2010	2001 (At the age of 40)	2013	2013
Self-identification	German	n/a	Hungarian	Russian	Russian	Russian

All the interviewers were informed about the purposes of the study and gave their oral consent on the processing of information.

3.3. The limitations of the study

The study of online communities, however, also has its limitations. Since participating in the internet life requires technical skills, time to respond to other users and the "ability to handle mass amounts of information," only the most active members of the community express their views online.[89] Moreover, the discussions in cyberspace often imply fake identities, mutual offences and the absence of arguments in posts. Another problematic aspect of research based on online discourse is the so-called "spiral of silence" – a fear shared by many people who are afraid to publicly express their opinion in case it is different from the views of the majority.[90] As was shown in the studies pertaining to the social identity/deindividuation (SIDE) theory, online discussions can be polarized as many

---

[89] Alejandra Rojo and Ronald Ragsdale, "Participation in Electronic Forums: Implications for the Design and Implementation of Collaborative Distributed Multimedia," *Thematics and Informatics* 14, no. 1 (1997): 83–96.
[90] Keith Hampton, "Social Media and the 'Spiral of Silence'" (PewResearch Internet Project, 2014)

participants remain silent members and do not post any comments, while only representatives of the opposite opinions actively engage in discussions.[91]

Therefore, this study is unable to encompass the entire spectrum of opinions of minority groups – only those that were publicly expressed on online platforms. The reader should bear in mind that the study focuses on the analysis of those Russian-speaking residents, who express extreme anti-refugee rhetoric. Although the majority of the analyzed messages constitute discriminative and radical views, the current work does not take into consideration messages of those users who have positive attitudes towards new-comers. Also, some of the scholars make unsubstantiated claims that Russian-speaking groups in Germany were intentionally mobilized by Russia's government,[92] while in reality, this statement can be hard to prove (although some interconnections can be indeed traced). Therefore, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to determine the possible attempts of Russia's government to manipulate the views of the residents in Germany. However, the possibility of the existence of sponsored automated messages (bots) are taken into consideration and would be considered as part of the discourse since users interact and engage with these statements by producing self-reflected messages. It is important to mention that all the quotes in the present thesis belong to the "real" users. Each profile was verified individually through reviewing its activity, availability of photos and participation in the other non-politicized discussions.

---

[91] Anita Breuer, Todd Landman, and Dorothea Farquhar, "Social Media and Protest Mobilization: Evidence from the Tunisian Revolution," *Democratization* 22, no. 4 (2015).

[92] Mitrokhin, "«Sluchai Devochki Lizy»: Russkoiazychnye Storonniki Putina v Germanii i Nemetskii Pravyi Radikalizm."

4. RUSSIAN-SPEAKING MIGRANTS IN THE AGE OF WEB 2.0.

The following chapter aims to overview the role of Russian-language SNS in the potential spreading of discriminative rhetoric among the members of the migrant groups. The research conducted by Nell Elias and Marina Shoren-Zeltser has shown that Russian-language "diasporic" websites present to be transnational spaces where post-Soviet migrants tend to reflect on their past, present and future[93] thus reconstructing shared practices and redefining the perception of the group symbolic boundaries. Hence, the present chapter considers several interconnected aspects. First, I focus on how in the age of the so-called "Web 2.0." ethnic minorities tend to negotiate their aspirational identities by the mean of using the SNS. The next sub-chapter deals with consideration of Runet and migrant involvement in it as well as why involvement in the Russian-language media can hold predisposition for the spread of anti-immigrant views.

4.1. SNS and the representation of migrant groups

Starting from 2001, the internet has entered the new stage of its development – the so-called era of the "user-generated content" or the "Web 2.0." This definition, firstly introduced by Tim O'Reilly,[94] implies that specificity of internet communication and development of digital media transformed users from "consumers" to "producers" of cultural, social and political discourse and practices. As cultural theorist Henry Jenkins stated in his book "Spreadable Media"[95] now the digital world allows its members to move to a "participatory model of culture" aiming at reshaping, reimagining, reframing and remixing previously preconstructed messages. Although, as was noted by José Dijck in his article dedicated to the

---

[93] Nell Elias and Marina Shoren-Zeltser, "Immigrants of the World Unite?" *Journal of International Communitcation* 12, no. 2 (2006): 70–90.
[94] Tim O'Reilly, *What Is Web 2.0?* (O'Reilly Media, 2009).
[95] Henry Jenkins and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media. Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York University Press, 2013).

agency of the user-generated content,[96] the majority of the users still constitute passive recipients (around 80%), the nature of this shift is in the desire of people to share information among members of their online groups. Jenkins even defined this phenomenon as a "networked culture" the main feature of which remains the spreadability of information.[97] New internet practices could, therefore, lead to a homogenization of certain types of discourses acceptable among this or that social group.

The nature of this shift also led to an increasing number of online social movements, although several scholars such as Symon Hill connect the spread of online activism with a global economic crisis of 2001 that exposed inequality in the world system.[98] According to Hill, contemporary social activism reflects attempts of the discriminated majority to reach the elitist class. Sociologist Clay Shirky states that the specificities of internet communication removed the existing boundaries and influenced on a predisposition for social movements' spreadability.[99] In contemporary digital world, participation in social movements with a clear agenda became much more accessible than in an offline world since the practices of mobilizations are also embedded into the practices of self-mediation.[100] Although there is still no agreement regarding the classification of online activism, online mobilization, and online social movements, most of the scholars state that the internet social movements could be at the same time instruments and restriction of social reforms.

This could be especially evident on the example of the WhatsApp mobilization for the "Lisa case." As one of the respondents for this research pointed out:

"You are asking me if I participated in the rallies? Of course, I am! I did it because I was afraid that these Muslims will rape my wife and my daughters. We did not really care if the "Lisa case" was fake or not, all that we thought about is the safety of our families. This is why we protested against new-coming refugees and Merkel's politics. After the rallies, we

---

[96] José Dijck, "Users like You? Theorizing Agency in User-Generated Content," *Media, Culture and Society* 31 (2009): 41–58.
[97] Jenkins and Green, *Spreadable Media. Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*.
[98] Hill, *Digital Revolutions: Activism in the Internet Age*.
[99] Clay Shirky, *The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* (Penguin books, 2008).
[100] Nancy Thumim, *Self-Representation and Digital Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

also patrolled the streets of our city at nights, so our women and children could safely return home. I found out about the protests via WhatsApp chat, some of my local friends sent me this message."[101]

As was observed by Evgenii Morozov,[102] online social movements can also cause "mobilization for mobilization" – a situation when a group can come to streets without understanding the reasons and causes for activism. Another respondent for this research residing in the small town in the Southern part of Germany also noted:

"I came to the place that was indicated in the WhatsApp message. The square was full of us – Russian-speaking people – but none of us knew why we were there. As time passed, no one made any speeches; everyone kept asking each other about this rally. Moreover, then we just joined hands and marched across the streets of our town! That was amazing! At that moment I felt that we are the power that we are holding together with no matter what![103]"

The homogeneity of the spreadable discourse is especially evident in the example of online groups designed for migrant or diasporic communities. The ability of diasporic groups to create stable online interconnections with former co-patriots attracted some scholar interest. The phenomenon received the name "digital" or "online diaspora." Victoria Bernal was among the first scholars who traced interconnections between cyberspace and representation of diasporic identities. In her article published in 2006 "Diaspora, cyberspace and political imagination: the Eritrean diaspora online"[104] Bernal argues that in the case of Eritrean diasporic community cyber communication plays a role of a "transnational public sphere" designed explicitly for reproducing public debates on culture, democracy, identity, and politics.

Although the Russian-speaking population in Germany could be barely defined as "diaspora" since it lacks several interconnected factors defining "diaspora" in its classical

---

[101] Respondent 2. Interview: 28.11.2018.
[102] Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (PublicAffairs, 2012).
[103] Respondent 3. Interview: 15.11.2018
[104] Bernal, "Diaspora, Cyberspace and Political Imagination: The Eritrean Diaspora Online."

understanding as a community of people having the common homeland,[105] the internet creates a field for homogenization of nationhood practices and group construction. In her book "Diaspora Online" Ruxandra Trandafoiu claimed that migrant internet spaces have a predisposition for political mobilization in a situation when a group perceives discrimination towards one of its members.[106] The migrant online platforms, therefore, allow their members to create a sense of belonging to an imagined community and also reproduce certain practices of nationhood.[107] Moreover, cyberspace allows migrants to validate their aspirational identity and political perspectives, moving beyond traditional practices of both the home and host societies.

In contrast to other online groups, the Russian-speaking digital community is built on the common knowledge of the Russian language, not a perceived ethnicity, and includes people with different citizenships, ethnic and religious identifications.[108] According to Ellias and Shorer-Zeltser, such types of post-Soviet migrant communities "are united on the basis of the Russian language and culture, collective memories and common history" and present to be homogeneous transnational spaces where post-Soviet migrants from all other world engage in the act of reflection on the past, present and future.[109]

4.2. The specificities of the Russian-language internet groups

According to Larisa Fialkova, Russian-speaking migrants all across the globe engage in local migrant online groups due to the feeling of alienation that they experience in the host society, understanding of common cultural roots as well as "inclusive policy of the Russian

---

[105] Khachig Tölölyan, "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment," *A Journal of Transnational Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996): 3–36.
[106] Trandafoiu, *Diaspora Online: Identity Politics and Romanian Migrants*.
[107] Bernal, "Diaspora, Cyberspace and Political Imagination: The Eritrean Diaspora Online."
[108] Elias Nelli and Marina Shorer-Zel'tser, "Moi Adres Ne Dom i Ne Ulitsa: Russkoiazychnaia Diaspora v Internete," *Diasporas* 2 (2008): 178–94.
[109] Elias and Shoren-Zeltser, "Immigrants of the World Unite?"

Federation."[110] At the same time, Robert Saunders emphasized that some migrant groups use SNS due to a rational desire to get business advantages, not because of the attachment to cultural practices.[111] In this sub-chapter, I consider the self-mediation practices of the Russian-speaking users in Germany and, particularly, their involvement in the Russian-language cyberspace.

As the research conducted by Weiskopf and Kissau reveals, more than 75,6 % of the Russian-speaking migrants in Germany in 2008 used the internet to keep in touch with co-patriots, while 70% of all respondents use Russian-language websites on an everyday basis. Most of the users had poor German language skills (49,2%) while those who spoke German fluently used both Russian and German internet.[112] Most of the respondents for the Weiskopf and Kissau' research also mentioned that they use Russian-language online space in order to reconnect with the Russian-speakers living in Germany.[113]

This trend correlates with the data from the Boris Nemtsov's foundation survey that revealed that more than 60% of the Russian-speaking migrants use the Russian state channels as the primary sources for self-mediation. [114] At the same time, more than 50% of the respondents also stated that they have more trust in the Russian media than in German[115] since the German media are perceived to be the "bulwark of Merkel's ideological propaganda." Sociologist Nikolai Mitrokhin confirms that his ethnographic research revealed that ethnic German resettlers think of the Russian state channels as more "objective."[116] During the interview for the present thesis, one of the respondents mentioned that in his hometown

---

[110] L. Fialkova, "Emigrants from the FSU and the Russian-Language Internet," *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* 12 (2005), http://sites.utoronto.ca/tsq/12/fialkova12.shtml.

[111] Saunders, *Ethnopolitics in Cyberspace*.

[112] Inna Weiskopf and Kathrin Kissau, "Internet and the Integration of Immigrants in Germany and Israel. Characteristics and Potentials," *German Policy Studies* 4, no. 4 (2008): 95–124.

[113] Weiskopf and Kissau.

[114] Mitrokhin, "«Sluchai Devochki Lizy»: Russkoiazychnye Storonniki Putina v Germanii i Nemetskii Pravyi Radikalizm."

[115] Boris Nemtsov' foundation survey, 2016. Russian-speaking Germans.

[116] Mitrokhin, "«Sluchai Devochki Lizy»: Russkoiazychnye Storonniki Putina v Germanii i Nemetskii Pravyi Radikalizm."

Dingolfing (Bavaria), the Russian TV channels are particularly popular among the post-Soviet migrants:

"<…> I am very involved in the life of the local Russian-speakers. I come, help them a lot. I set them up to their television antennas. And I get really angry when locals tell me: "Oh, why do I need German TV? Just set me up to the Russian channels.""[117]

Later he continued:

"When my mom came here, she was able to speak German on the A1-A2 level. However, when she settled down in the Russian neighbourhood where all the repatriates live, she got state subsidies and started to watch the Russian TV. Now she does not speak German at all; she does not need that."[118]

The distrust in German media was also evident during the interviews with other users – all respondents mentioned that they do not trust any major news channels both in Russian and in German due to the high level of state propaganda. For all respondents, the Russian-language SNS present to be the primary sources for self-mediation:

"I am not interested in any news, I do not read any local newspapers, I do not watch TV. If I need to know something, I open Yandex-news [Russian-language search engine, an alternative to Google], but mostly listen to what my mom (she lives in Russia, we talk via Skype) or my husband says. I do not trust local newspapers, they have much propaganda from the parties. That is the reason why I stopped reading them. Russian newspapers have that too."

Or

"I mostly trust Russian media, it does not have any propaganda like German do. Also, I check the Russian-language forum, people always share there much news."[119]

Therefore, Russian-speaking migrants in Germany are highly involved in the Russian-language segment of the internet – the so-called Runet that has its own specific set of characteristics rooted in the 1990s. Following the dissolution of the USSR and the fall of the Iron Curtain, the post-Soviet space experienced a new cultural revolution that coincided with

---

[117] Ethnic German repatriate, interview: 25.10.2018.
[118] Ethnic German repatriate, interview: 25.10.2018.
[119] Ethnic German repatriate, interview: 25.10.2018.

the development of internet technologies all across the globe.[120] After decades of totalitarian rule, an opportunity to be reconnected in cyberspace was perceived as the manifestation of freedom. This led to the development of a specific set of characteristics that represented the cultural and social practices of post-Soviet online communication.[121] As was noted by Ronald Deibert and Rafal Rohozinski the Runet constitutes a "self-contained linguistic and cultural environment with well-developed search engines, Web portals, social network sites, and free e-mail services."[122] Sociologist D. J. Peterson claims that despite popular culture and consumer preferences, the English-language internet does not have much impact on the Runet culture. [123] This could be connected with the low level of English proficiency and the lack of interest in global knowledge and culture. Although the situation slightly changes with every year due to the rising number of English-speaking youngsters, the general trend of exclusion stays the same.

The two main factors, therefore, influence the migrant representation in the Runet. The first one is a desire to be reconnected with the post-Soviet present as well as the constructed vision of the Soviet past. On the other hand, many Russian-speaking migrants aim at constructing stabilized networking relations with the members of the same language group.[124]

How could the involvement of the Russian-speaking migrants in the Russian-language media influence the rising anti-refugee views? Media presents particular importance in the formation of discriminative rhetoric since in post-socialist Russia, the anti-immigrant attitudes

---

[120] Henrike Schmidt, Katy Teubener, and Nils Zyrawski, "Virtual (Re)Unification? Diasporic Cultures on the Russian Internet," in *Control + Shift. Public and Private Usages of the Russian Internet* (Books on demand, 2006), 120–47.

[121] Konradova and Schmidt, "From the Utopia of Autonomy to a Political Battlefield: Towards a History of the 'Russian Internet.'"

[122] Robert Deibert et al., eds., *Access Controlled. The Shaping of Power, Rights, and Rule in Cyberspace* (The MIT Press, 2010), 19.

[123] D. J. Peterson, *Russia and the Information Revolution* (RAND Corporation, 2005), 15.

[124] Adi Kuntsman, "Webs of Hate in Diasporic Cyberspaces: The Gaza War in the Russian-Language Blogosphere," *Media, War and Conflict* 3, no. 3 (2010): 299–313.

present to be a new social stigma.[125] The Russian-language popular culture reflects the high level of xenophobic attitudes within society. According to Pipiia, the main factor for xenophobia in Russia remains "ethnophobia" – distrust to "others" according to their physical differences. Another significant factor presents to be "migrantophobia" which is characterized by the cultural racism amplified with prejudices and common stereotypes through social media.[126] Gorodzeisky claims that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia faced with the necessity to find a new ideological line that would reunite the "people" and restore the "national pride." Therefore, restrictive migration policy, historical and cultural discourse of the "nation-state," and restoration of Soviet nostalgia, cultivated a common a sense of intolerance toward the "others."[127] Marine Laruelle also claims that anti-immigrant attitudes and civilizational rhetoric are embedded in the discourse of contemporary Russian nationalist organizations that have recently gained popularity in the popular culture.[128] Following Russia's involvement in the Syrian conflict in 2015, many media sources began to openly introduce discriminatory practices, drawing refugees as marginal, illegal and uneducated.[129] [130]

Nikolai Mitrokhin even claims that the main reason for Islamophobic and right-wing populist mobilization among Russian-speakers in Germany remains their consumption of Russia's official TV programs as well as activity of the "troll-fabrics" that create

---

[125] A. Gorodzeisky, A. Glikman, and D. Maskileyson, "The Nature of Anti-Immigrant Sentiment in Post-Socialist Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 31, no. 2 (2015): 115–35.

[126] Karina Pipiia, "Ksenofobskie Nastroeniia v Rossiiskom Obshchestvennom Mnenii i Puti Ikh Predotvrashchneniia" (Sociologica Centre of the Russian Academy of Science, 2017).

[127] Anastasia Gorodzeisky and Moshe Semyonov, "Not Only Competetive Threat But Also Racial Prejudice: Sources of Anti-Immigrant Attitudes in European Societies," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 28, no. 3 (2015): 331–54.

[128] Marlene Laruelle, "The Ideological Shift on the Russian Radical Right," *Problems of Post-Communism* 57, no. 6 (2010): 19–31.

[129] Rashid Gabdulhakov, "Russian Media Discourse on Syrian Refugees in Europe and Central Asian Labour Migrants in Russia: Russia for Russians, Europe For...?" *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs* 42 (2016): 3–33.

[130] Oleg Panfilov, "Rebirth of Russian Nationalism," in *Politics in Russia: A Reader* (Sage Publications, 2013), 476–82.

discriminative memes the radical character of which could mobilize the users.[131] On the contrary, I argue that due to respondents' involvement in the SNS and participation (sometimes even silent) in the discussions, the users present to be not just silent "consumers" of discriminative discourse, but rather "actors" that reproduce the anti-immigrant views.

Cyberspace allows its members to express views different from the commonly accepted social norms. Other important aspects that lead to the radicalization of online discourse are the perceived privacy and the sense of groupness, which occur when people with prejudiced views take part in radical discussions. According to Andre Oboler, SNS play an essential role in spreading the Islamophobic views since users usually engage in the social groups that they find relevant to their self-identification.[132] Adi Kuntsman claims that the Runet was formed with a particularly complex set of practices that include changed perceptions of geopolitical space[133] and often racialized discourse of belonging and otherness that can also be shaped by contemporary politics.

Therefore, if a specific set of values presents to be socially acceptable, in the social group, users often acquire the same views on the issues.[134] Several studies also observed that online channels for communication allow validating users' beliefs and helping them to achieve a sense of belonging to a particular set of discriminative values.[135] Therefore, the internet plays a role of a medium for digital hybridization of minority groups, hence creating a field for socially acceptable non-normative behavior.

4.4. Summary

To sum up, SNS designed explicitly for communication among the Russian-speaking migrants present to be assemblage points where users can reconnect with co-patriots, obtain a

---

[131] "«Sluchai Devochki Lizy»: Russkoiazychnye Storonniki Putina v Germanii i Nemetskii Pravyi Radikalizm."
[132] Oboler, "The Normalisation of Islamophobia through Social Media: Facebook."
[133] Kuntsman, "Webs of Hate in Diasporic Cyberspaces: The Gaza War in the Russian-Language Blogosphere," 301–2.
[134] Oboler, "The Normalisation of Islamophobia through Social Media: Facebook," 42–43.
[135] Ana-Maria Bliuc, Andrew Jakubowicz, and Craig McGarty, "Online Networks of Racial Hate: A Systematic Review of 10years of Research on Cyber-Racism," *Computers in Human Behavior* 87 (2018): 75–86.

certain set of cultural practices, and reconstruct their vision on many social and political aspects. By engaging in the discussions, users become co-producers of a particular type of rhetoric that presents to be acceptable among members of the chosen social groups. Among the users, there is a commonly shared vision of official Russian media as less ideologically biased comparing to German news sources.[136] In this regard, I tend to disagree with Nikolai Mitrokhin, who claims that the main reason for the group mobilization remains the activity of pro-Russian organizations in Germany.[137] On the opposite, I argue that even though the potential influence of the government actions cannot be denied, the formation of anti-migrant rhetoric has primarily taken place through the co-production of daily discriminatory discourse where users take the role of discourse "producers." At the same time, a particular set of discriminative rhetoric is acceptable among the Russian-language internet due to the abovementioned specificities of its development and a high level of xenophobic attitudes in contemporary Russia.[138]

---

[136] Mitrokhin, "«Sluchai Devochki Lizy»: Russkoiazychnye Storonniki Putina v Germanii i Nemetskii Pravyi Radikalizm."
[137] Mitrokhin.
[138] Pipiia, "Ksenofobskie Nastroeniia v Rossiiskom Obshchestvennom Mnenii i Puti Ikh Predotvrashchneniia."

5. WHO ARE THE "OTHERS"? ANTI-IMMIGRANT ATTITUDES THROUGH THE PRYSM OF NETNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

With the start of the "refugee crisis" in 2015, many Russian-speaking migrants in Germany have started to embed the discursive features of marginalization in their daily language, thus reflecting on the change in their perception of symbolic boundaries. This chapter provides the results of the netnographic analysis of the chosen SNS, where the notion of "refugee crisis" has been collectively redefined and reconstructed. After providing a summary of the structure of the analyzed discussions, I consider how users reflect on the "refugee crisis" in relation to their own migration experience. In the second sub-chapter, I analyze how users construct the "otherness" through presumably the most salient categories of symbolic boundaries,[139] such as race, culture, language, and religion. The next section deals with the consideration of the self-identification process and intragroup relations among the Russian-speaking users. It argues that many users employ the identity category of "white Slavic Christianism" in order to redefine their sense of belonging to the host majority.

To analyze the conducted material, I followed the six-step approach to netnographic research that was suggested by Kozinets.[140] First, I have started my observations in November 2017 by continually checking the updates in the three main chosen discussions "Destroyed Europe" in the forum "Germany in Russian" (around 19 000 comments), "Are you for or against refugees?" in the VK (853 comments), "The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted"[141] (9555 messages). Then, I formulated my research question and concentrated on the discursive processes of "othering" that were reproduced by the members of the chosen discussions on an everyday basis. All the analyzed messages were taken together in the one

---

[139] Christopher Bail, "The Configuration of Symbolic Boundaries against Immigrants in Europe," *American Sociological Review* 73 (2008): 37–59.
[140] Kozinets, *Netnography: Redefined.*
[141] *The AFD is a devil that is not that black as it is painted.* URL: https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11.06.2018)

Excel file and classified according to several categories that presented the most analytical value for the present work.

5.1. The structure of discussions

5.1.1. Forum "Germany in Russian"

One of the platforms for the user-generated discussions on the issues of populism, right-wing politics and "refugee crisis" became the platform "Германия по-русски" or "Germany in Russian." The website was created in 1999 and soon became the largest platform for communication designed explicitly for the Russian-speaking population residing abroad. Its popularity has grown with every month. For example, at the end of December 2017, it had 765 758 registered users and 558 "guests" who do not have an account but visited the website in the last 24 hours. By the beginning of May 2019, the number of users has increased to 788059 members adding approximately around 1000 new members on a monthly basis. As Nell Elias and Marina Shoren-Zeltser pointed out, only 60% percent of those who registered in the "Germany in Russian" forum live in Germany, 25% live in the other European countries, 4% live in the US, and 1% live in Israel. Hence, the authors conclude that the forum constitutes a transnational space where Russian-speaking migrants could exchange common experience.[142]

The website consists of ten sections: "Poster"; "Dating"; "Photos"; "Forums"; "Groups"; "Diaries"; "Chat"; "Shop"; "Firms and services"; "Announcements." A particular interest presents the section "Forums" where members of the group are eligible to participate in almost unmoderated discussions. All topics in the "Forums" sections are also divided into several subgroups: "Our Living room;" "Culture and Art;" "Chat offline;" "Everyday problems;" "Everything about Germany;" "Computer & IT;" "Immigration, Visa and Consulate' questions;" "Private Announcements." The first section "Our Living room" is

---

[142] Elias and Shoren-Zeltser, "Immigrants of the World Unite?"

designed for the most controversial topics such as political, historical, philosophical ones – the themes that people usually discuss in their spare time. The subsection "Discussion club" consists of constantly updatable set of themes that are usually reflect current news in one or another way connected to Russia (for example "New sanctions against Russia," "Scripal – did Putting really need that??" and others) as well as those discussions that remain hot topical for the last three years in the discourse of the official Russian media (for example "Destroyed Europe," "Why the West hates Russia?," "Where the Great and Indivisible Ukraine moves?")[143]

According to the rules of the forum, all topics should start with the information about the subject and the author's opinion that he/she desires to discuss. All the messages should contain profound judgments and do not repeat the same arguments twice; users are banned for any insults or transitions on individuals – the rules of the forum allow to post only well-constructed answers.[144] Even though the analyzed online discussions often lack the proper moderation, the regulation rules make the "Discussion thread" easy to analyze as the total majority of all messages contain well-structured opinions.

5.1.2. VK discussion

The structure of the VK discussion is somewhat different from the forum "Germany in Russian." VK originally was created in 2006 as a student social network and transformed rapidly to the most popular Russian-language SNS. Being an analogue of Facebook, in 2019 VK has gained more than 50 000 000 users and has become the second most popular website in Russia.[145]

---

[143] See: *Discussion Club*. Germany in Russian. URL: https://foren.germany.ru/discus.html?Cat= (Access date: 20.05.2018)

[144] *Rules of the Discussion Club*. Germany in Russian. URL: https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/6991949.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11.06.2018)

[145] Daniyar Sapargaliyev and Assel Jetmekova, "Using Social Network Vkontakte for Studying Sociology," 2013.

The group "Russians in Germany – LET'S UNITE" (9199 members) was created in 2010 as a platform for communication for the Russian-speaking residents living in Germany. In most of the cases, members of the group exchange useful information and tips regarding life in Germany such as visa issues, language courses, and cultural events. The majority of all posts have only 2-15 comments and do not get much attention from the users. The only pinned and actively updated discussion is called "Are you for or against refugees?" It has started in September 2015 by the admin of the group and by the end of May 2019 it has had 861 comments. Comparing to messages in the forum, comments in the VK discussion are much shorter, and due to the lack of moderation in the group contain more extreme statements.

5.2. Reflecting on the migration experience

As was shown in the previous chapter, SNS present to be the mediums for migrant communication and the only places where "post-Soviet migrant culture"[146] could exist. According to Jennifer Brinkerhoff, through involvement in the discussions, users reconstruct their experience of migration.[147] Nell Elias and Marina Shoren-Zeltser have also claimed that SNS give Russian-speaking migrants a space for expression, positive representation and empowerment.[148] In this regard, it is particularly important to analyze how users represent in the SNS their act of migration and how do they relate the experience of refugees to their own.

5.2.1. Describing their own experience

Even though the primary purpose of all analyzed discussions was to debate on the consequences of the "refugee crisis" in Germany, the conversations usually transformed into a broad set of reflections on life in migration. The descriptions of nostalgia and dissatisfaction have become the integral parts of such debates. Some users even employed the notion of

[146] Elias and Shoren-Zeltser, "Immigrants of the World Unite?"
[147] Brinkerhoff, *Digital Diasporas: Idenitty and Transnational Engagement.*
[148] Elias and Shoren-Zeltser, "Immigrants of the World Unite?"

"Soviet past" as an ideal mythical space where everyone was equal, and no one had to compete.[149] According to Pål Colstø, such type of discursive reflections is common among the former co-citizens of the post-Soviet space that obtained a crisis of national identities after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. [150] However, in the analyzed online space users with such opinions often face fierce confrontation from the ethnic resettlers who provide arguments for the discriminatory policies of the Soviet government against Soviet Germans.[151]

Many users describe the act of migration with the words "disillusionment," "unfulfilled dreams," "catastrophe" or "abandonment." In many ways, the sense of abandonment is common among ethnic German repatriates who are not satisfied with their position in society:

"We came, nobody met us, nobody REALLY wanted us despite their official letters of invitation. Maybe it would be better if we stayed in Kazakhstan."[152]

Or

"When we came, I felt like nobody needs us. Starting from my childhood, I have always had a feeling of an impending storm."[153]

The sense of "abandonment" could derive from the prejudices that ethnic repatriates faced upon arrival in Germany. The reason for that was that due to the specificity of "ethnic" German immigration policy, many Germans did not perceive migrants from the post-Soviet

---

[149] The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian.
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11. 05. 2019)
[150] Pål Kolstø, "The New Russian Diaspora - an Identity of Its Own? Possible Identity Trajectories for Russians in the Former Soviet Republic," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 19, no. 3 (1996): 609–39.
[151] The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian.
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11. 05. 2019)
[152] The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian.
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11. 05. 2019)
[153] The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian.
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11. 05. 2019)

space as "real Germans." Most of them still refer to this group as "Russians"[154] therefore re-defining them as internal "others."[155] Being the objects of prejudices themselves, many users stated their desire to stay in the Russian-language groups since involvement into the network of post-Soviet migrants allows to have access to many business, job, and cultural opportunities:

"I immigrated to Germany when I was fifteen and, for a long time, I have not spoken Russian. My Russian was bad. However, 15 years ago, I realized how important the Russian-speaking community is and started to use Russian on an everyday basis. Now all of my business connections are among the Russian-language circles."[156]

Or

"German is good, German is useful. However, you will never be able to express yourself fully. I always speak Russian with my friends and family, although my children do not like it. I work in a German company, but even there I have found Russian-speaking friends."[157]

During the personal conversations, some of the users who came to Germany as repatriates elaborated explicitly on the importance of post-Soviet migrant networks. When the repatriates moved to Germany in the 1990s, the absence of language proficiency and the massive character of migration flows led to Russian-language segregation of urban spaces in many German cities. This negatively influenced on the level of cultural integration into the host society, which was explicitly evident in the case of the first-generation migrants.[158] Aussiedlers were the most privileged of all migrant groups in Germany due to their right to obtain German citizenship and full civil rights. Upon their arrival, ethnic returnees could attend free language and integration courses.

---

[154] Barbara Pfetsch, "'In Russia We Were Germans, and Now We Are Russians.' - Dilemmas of Identity Formation and and Communication among German-Russian Aussiedler" (WZB Berlin Social Science Center, 1999).
[155] Mikhail Alexeev, "Majority and Minority Xenophobia in Russia: The Importance of Being Titulars," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 26, no. 2 (2010): 89–120.
[156] Ethnic German repatriate, interview: 25.10.2018.
[157] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL: https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall. (Access date: 25.05.2019)
[158] Meng and Protassova, "Young Russian-German Adults 20 Years after Their Repatriation to Germany."

Moreover, the group was eligible to receive financial state support covering moral injuries from the Soviet state discrimination. Therefore, the act of repatriation was perceived by many returnees as a comeback to "ethnic homeland." By the time of crossing the border, most migrants identified themselves as Germans, although the knowledge of the language and real familiarity with cultural practices remained to be very low – during the Soviet nationality policy families were not allowed to speak German publicly. Few families that spoke German at home used an old dialect, that was in many ways different from the contemporary German.[159] For this reason, many faced with difficulties with finding a job due to poor knowledge of the German language. The official statistics prove this point – in the year 2010, more than 85% of the first-generation migrants experienced problems with employment.[160]

In contrast, economic migrants explain their usage of the Russian language with a conscious unwillingness to integrate. In this regard, a particular interest presents the user from Transcarpathia, who during the interview explicitly mentioned that German society forces migrants to integrate and does not accept diversity:

"When I came here, everyone kept telling me: learn German, German, German. And I would not do it! I do not want to! These Germans think that we have to adjust to them, learn their language and practices. And I would not do it! I have been working here for seven years now, all my family moved here from Transcarpathia. And we all speak Russian and Hungarian."[161]

The other two users who migrated to Germany because of the work opportunities, during the interviews also mentioned the pressure that they encounter regarding the language. For them, German is highly connected with the notions of "German mentality" and "negative cultural practices." However, the spouses reflected on their migration experience with opposing views. Even though according to both of them, the reason for leaving Russia was a desire "to see how people live abroad," the level of dissatisfaction with life in Germany presents to be quite different. The man who is successfully working in one of the largest

---

[159] Meng and Protassova.
[160] Boris Nemtsov's foundation survey, 2016.
[161] Respondent from Transcarpathia, 11.11.2018.

44

German companies and uses German on an everyday basis, named only three disadvantages: "high taxes, many refugees, the lack of democracy."[162] On the contrary, his wife who does not speak German, mentioned only two advantages of living in Germany ("good climate and satisfactory economic situation,") and around 100 disadvantages that cover both cultural and economic aspects. The language plays an important role:

"And, of course, one of the main disadvantages of life in Germany are its language and mentality. Yes, it might sound funny, but German is not the most pleasant language to learn, I always want to make it easier, more modern. German mentality is tough; I barely can understand them, accept all their restrictions and smile constantly. I want to feel alive."[163]

The reflections on migration reveal the "identity crisis" of many users and often cause heated debates about the notion of "deservingness" that appears to be the most common reason for intergroup conflicts in the forum. The majority of all the conflicts appear between ethnic resettlers and other Russian-speaking residents from the post-Soviet space. In the case of the Russian-Germans, the discussions are often amplified with the word "invited." By constantly underlying that legal invitations justify their presence in Germany, resettlers put themselves in a higher category than other migrants. At the same time, many of them acknowledge the fact that despite being "desirable migrants" they still belonged to a commonly marginalized group.[164]

On the contrary, users who identify themselves as economic migrants react to the reports of ethnic repatriates by accusing them of being conservative and unable to integrate:

"You live in your villages on state subsidies and think that you know everything. Ha-ha. You even don't know the German language, but you claim to be "Germans." We don't know German neither, but we do not say that we are Germans."[165]

---

[162] Economic migrant from Russia (male), interview: 12.12.2017.
[163] Economic migrant from Russia (female), interview: 12.12.2017.
[164] Destroyed Europe, #2299 URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1
(Access date: 20.03.2019)
[165] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL:
https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall. (Access date: 25.05.2019)

The Jewish repatriates who constitute the other large Russian-speaking group in Germany, are barely discussed in the chosen topics, just as users rarely identify themselves as Jewish. Despite few anti-Semitic jokes,[166] anti-Jewish sentiments are rarely expressed. On the contrary, in the discussion thread "AfD is a devil which is not as black as it is painted" many users justify their pro-populist views with phrases "even our Jews are voting for them," or "how can you say that the AfD is a Nazi party? Jews vote for them too."[167] From the analyzed discussions, there was only one dispute between the ethnic repatriate and a user who claimed to be of Jewish origin. As the following quote shows, the dispute also unfolded around the notion of "deservingness."

" – Germans who came to their historic motherland and Jews whose relatives have nothing to do with Germany? Why in hell should they have equal rights? <…>
- Germans who returned to their motherland? Please, it's funny. Where are your ancestors who lived here? How many generations ago was it? I have the same right to claim that my relatives lived there, and I have THE SAME RIGHT to come and live here." [168]

This type of discursive features could be related to what Simon, Reichert and Grabow call "identity incapability" or dual identification that they define as "identification with both one's ethnocultural minority in-group and one's society of residence."[169] According to the authors, Russian-speaking migrants in Germany experience dual identification and are more easily subjected to mobilization and radical political actions than other major migrant groups, such as the Turkish population.[170] Jennifer Brinkerhoff provides the same argument by stating that the fact of migration has a predisposition for possible radicalization since many migrants

---

[166] Destroyed Europe, #19639. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1
(Access date: 20.03.2019)
[167] The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11.06.2018)
[168] Destroyed Europe, #4394. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1
(Access date: 20.03.2019)
[169] "When Dual Identity Becomes a Liability: Identity and Political Radicalism Among Migrants."
[170] Simon, Reichert, and Grabow.

could not express their hybrid identification.[171] The internet platforms for communication, therefore, play the role of assemblage points where migrants could express the duality of their self-perception with reflecting on their experience of migration, describing dissatisfaction or arguing regarding the "deservingness" of being in Germany.

5.2.2. The appearance of the "others"

In the following section, I consider how users justify their anti-refugee attitudes in relation to their own migration experience. The word cloud below illustrates the most frequently used words in the analyzed VK discussion "Are you for or against refugees?" (851 comments). In the centre of the graph is the word "ОНИ" which can be directly translated as "OTHERS." Among the other most frequently used words are: "приехали" or "arrived," "беженцы" or "refugees," "война" or "war," "против" or "against," "эти" or "these," and other words with similar connotations.

Figure 1. The word cloud of the most common words in the VK discussion "Are you for or against refugees?"[172]

Many users explicitly oppose their experience of moving to Germany to the experience of new-coming migrants. Although the users in the analyzed discussions generally deny that the notion of "migration" is applicable to them since they "came to work, not to rape," many

---

[171] Brinkerhoff, *Digital Diasporas: Idenitty and Transnational Engagement.*

[172] Generated with http://xn--80abe5adcqeb2a.xn--p1ai/. To build the graph, I used the commentaries from the discussion "Are you for or against refugees?" (URL: https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall)

employ the phrases that emphasize the dichotomy between "us" and "them": "we came as…," "they did not meet us…," "they thought about us…." By doing so, many draw the line between themselves and Germans. What is interesting in this type of self-descriptive practices is that when the same users describe the new-coming refugees, they use the notions of "our culture," "our Germany," "our world" thus relating themselves to the host majority. [173]

"Yeah, the only phrases like "Russian-German" or "Soviet-German" led to repudiation. This is an extraordinary tolerance when Germans turned their backs on "their own" and met the "others" with their hands outstretched."[174]

There is a shared view in the analyzed messages that refugees who pretend over the state subsidies are "unworthy" of that help. Users who identify themselves as ethnic resettlers are primarily concerned with the right of refugees to claim the same state support. To prove this point, many contrast themselves with the new-coming migrants by stating:

"<…> nobody met us with bread and salt, and we were okay with a small amount of money, we earned everything on our own!"[175]

One of the respondents for this research also holds a similar view. He emigrated to Germany at the age of fifteen under the Jewish resettlement program. Now he organizes rallies and demonstrations against refugees. He claims:

"No one met me with open arms, as they met *these* [refugees]. No one wanted to rent us flats, open the bank accounts. We had a lot of domestic difficulties, but I got through it, we all did it by ourselves. And *these* receive everything."[176]

As this quote shows, such type of discourse reflects the current views that can be labelled as "welfare chauvinist"[177] and are often amplified by the contemporary European

---

[173] Куды vadis Deutschland? URL: https://www.facebook.com/groups/kudyvadis/ (Access date: 25.05.2019)
[174] The AFD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11. 05. 2019)
[175] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL: https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall. (Access date: 25.05.2019)
[176] Respondent 2. Interview: 25.11.2018
[177] Tim Reeskens and Wim van Oorshot, "Disentangling the 'New Liberal Dilemma': On the Relation between General Welfare Redistribution Preferences and Welfare Chauvinism," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 2012.

right-wing populist parties.[178] Thus, the refugees present to be the "others" who pretend over the same symbolic and economic recognition from the state.[179] One user even quotes her friend who works in a refugee camp: "When Russians were here, there was no such a mess!."[180] According to the refugee camp worker, migrants that came in 2015 substituted a group of ethnic resettlers whom she defines as "Russians." The user then continues her thought with stating that Russian-speakers present to be the only eligible migrant group in Germany due to its similarities with local cultural values.

Therefore, being initially marginalized themselves, many Russian-speaking users justify their hostility towards the new-coming group by using the welfare chauvinist argumentation. Some users even reflect on their feelings by stating that social and economic inequality in Germany is a predominant factor that defines attitudes towards the new wave of migration. Being "representatives of the working class," some Russian-speakers claim that they have to face new-coming migrants on an everyday basis and see the "real situation" in contrast to the "upper-class Germans" who "live in wealthy districts where there are no Turks, <...> drive to work and do not use public transport, at the office they see only white faces." [181]

According to Christopher Bail, the way group constructs its symbolic boundaries could "reveal the interests of groups in competition for social resources."[182] This argument coincides with the general framework of the social identity theory that explains intergroup conflicts with the categories of in-group favouritism and out-group derogation as the way to strengthen the group self-perception that can be activated by competition over the same

---

[178] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL: https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall. Access date: 2019-04-25

[179] David Cunningham, "Mobilizing Ethnic Competition," *Theory and Society* 41, no. 5 (2012): 505–25.

[180] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL: https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall. (Access date: 19.04.2019)

[181] Destroyed Europe, #1758. URL: https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1. (Access date: 18.05.2019)

[182] Bail, "The Configuration of Symbolic Boundaries against Immigrants in Europe."

symbolic or economic resources.[183] As can be observed from the analyzed discourse, many users explain their hostility towards new-coming refugees with inequality and unproportioned power relations in German society. Therefore, one can suggest that reconfiguration of symbolic boundaries in a situation when the new "others" have appeared, can be caused by the perceived competition over the same symbolic and economic resources. Although anti-immigrant views in relation to the theory of inter-group competition are generally considered in the framework of host-majority and migrant minority, the analyzed discussions have shown that by employing anti-refugee views,[184] Russian-speaking migrants in Germany generally relate themselves to majority thus considering the new-coming wave of refugees as a threat to their group privileges.

5.3. Boundary reshaping process

According to Tilly, the process of symbolic boundary reshaping activates a sense of coordinated actions among members of the social group,[185] hence creating a specific type of mobilizing discourse. Due to limited censorship and perceived anonymity, online discussions tend to reflect the offline mobilization.[186] The following section focuses on the discourse that Russian-speaking internet users in Germany tend to employ in order to describe the "refugee crisis."

All the analyzed discussions have started with a general inquiry: "What do you think about *these* migrants?". At the same time, authors of the discussion threads provide their own vision of the situation immediately, thus setting up the direction of the conversations. For example, user *Altwad* from the thread "Destroyed Europe" claimed: "Please, be noted that in all the main German cities, the Muslim population is now prevailing. It has reached more than

---

[183] Carsten K.W. De Dreu, Hillie Aaldering, and Ozum Saygi, "Intergroup Conflict and Negotiating Settlement," in *Social Conflict within and between Groups* (Psychology Press, 2014), 1–19.
[184] Marc Hooghe and Thomas De Vroome, "The Perception of Ethnic Diversity and Anti-Immigrant Sentiments: A Multilevel Analysis of Local Communities in Belgium," in *Cities, Diversity and Ethnicity. Politics, Governance and Participation* (Routledge, 2016), 37–56.
[185] Tilly, "Social Boundary Mechanisms."
[186] Amichai-Hamburger, *The Social Net. Understanding Our Online Behaviour.*

50% of all citizens. 90% of all school students are also refugees from Africa and the Middle East. All my new neighbours are Muslims. Let's share more of the new "German" features."[187] The graph below illustrates the distribution of answers to the question "Are you for or against refugees?" that was published in the VK discussion in September 2015 and later was pinned by the group admins. As can be seen, the overwhelming majority of all commentaries contained a negative answer to the question:
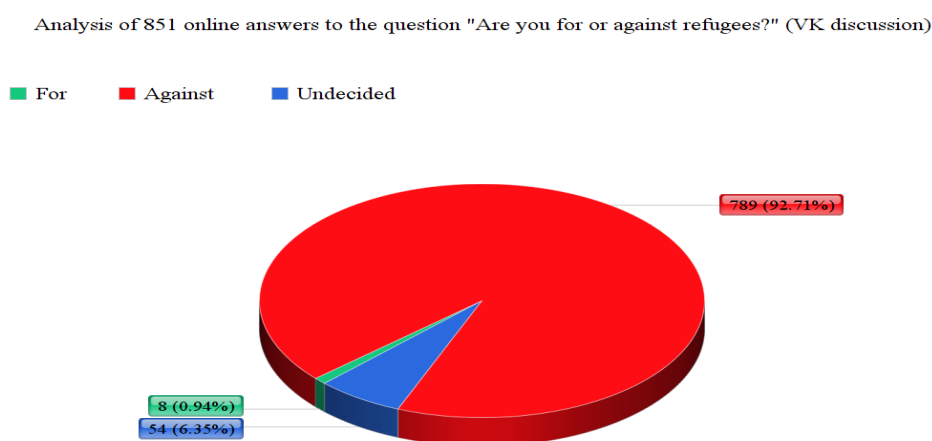

Figure 2. Analysis of 851 online answers to the question "Are you for or against refugees?"

As Ruxandra Trandafoiu has noted, online platforms for migrant communication could act as a political space for coordinated actions in a situation when online and offline social mobilizations coincide.[188] In the case of the analyzed discussions, the forum and VK threads acted as a collective political discursive space from the beginning of 2016 (following the pro-Lisa rallies) until autumn 2017, when the active phase of mobilization ended with the Bundestag elections and the end of the AfD mobilization. At that time, analyzed internet groups acted as political assemblage points for those users who wanted to participate in real-

---

[187] Destroyed Europe. Germany in Russian.Altwad #1.URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 26.05.2019)
[188] Trandafoiu, *Diaspora Online: Identity Politics and Romanian Migrants*.

life actions, such as patrolling streets at nights, so "women could safely return home,"[189] or participating in the PEGIDA[190] – German extreme nationalist far-right movement aiming to resist the "Islamization of Germany." Many members of the analyzed discussions were looking for neighbours in order to coordinate and organize local demonstrations against refugees. This period could be described as the active mode of the boundary reshaping process. At that time, Russian-speaking residents in Germany tried to coordinate against the perceived threat by participating in real-life actions and using excessively discriminative discursive features as a mean of symbolic protection.

Most of the messages on the analyzed SNS use war rhetoric as a way to describe the events of the "refugee crisis." Many of them contain extreme calls for participation in "military" actions:

"We need to burn all these [expletive] creatures! <…> Axe in hand and go!" or "At times like these, you wish you'd dropped more serious bombs on Syria..."[191]

The same type of discursive features is used to describe the future life in Germany that is often defined as a "lost battle."[192] In this regard, many users refer to a bad economic and political situation in the country, that "things could not get worse"[193] with the current political regime. Thus, many consider moving out of Germany as the only possible way "to get away from refugees." [194] Many users also share the vision that they are trapped in a "historical

---

[189] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL: https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall. (Access date: 19.04.2019)

[190] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL: https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall. (Access date: 19.04.2019)

[191] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL: https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall. (Access date: 19.04.2019)

[192] Куды vadis Deutschland? URL: https://www.facebook.com/groups/kudyvadis/ (Access date: 25.05.2019)

[193] Tina555 #288, The AFD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11. 06. 2018)

[194] Куды vadis Deutschland? URL: https://www.facebook.com/groups/kudyvadis/ (Access date: 25.05.2019)

resonance"[195] meaning that they tried to escape from "poverty, mess, army, bureaucratic hell, nationalism and criminality"[196] back in the Soviet times and faced with the same problems all over again in Germany. The only difference is that these issues caused not by restrictive Soviet ideology, but with the "horde of refugees."[197] The following quote illustrates the common attitudes among users that are willing to leave because of the high number of new-coming migrants:

"We are looking for some variants in Austria now <…>. We are not trying to naturalize in Germany anymore and not to invest here. However, the war shows the plan."[198]

In this perceived conflict, many Russian-speaking users define their role as "defenders"[199] of the German culture, who can see the "real picture" and "are not infected with multiculturalism."[200] In this case, discriminative discourse plays a role of a self-inclusionary practice that allows users to redefine self-perception from the category of "minority" to "majority." There is a shared view on Germans as "weak," [201] "incapable of making decisions" and "tormented by guilt." [202] By putting themselves in a higher position, many directly express pities on Germans that were not able to see the "forthcoming

---

[195] Destroyed Europe, #6225. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1
(Access date: 18.05.2019)
[196] Destroyed Europe, #6225. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1(Access date: 18.05.2019)
[197] Destroyed Europe, #6225. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1
(Access date: 18.05.2019)
[198] Vhde #299. The AFD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian.
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11. 06. 2018)
[199] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL:
https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall (Access date: 19.04.2019)
[200] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL:
https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall. (Access date: 19.04.2019)
[201] Vhde #299. The AFD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian.
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 19.04.2019)
[202] Vhde #299. The AFD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian.
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11. 06. 2018)

catastrophe." As the following quote illustrates, the notion of "defenders" also coincides with the perception of masculinity and inscribed gender roles that still prevails in post-Soviet cultural practices.[203] The user was referring to the events of New Year celebration of 2016 when more than 200 women were raped in Cologne:[204][205]

"<…> The only person who stood up for women that night was Russian. Or at least Russian-speaking. And any German would first consult with his lawyer how can he protect his woman, so he, God forbid, would not break the law. Honestly, if I were in a situation when my woman is threatened, I would not care about any law in the world."[206]

What is interesting in this type of discriminative rhetoric, is that Russian-speaking users position themselves against all other groups and describe their uniqueness with the role of defenders of the German culture. It can be connected with the theory of group-based hierarchies that explain anti-immigrant attitudes as a way how majority justify their "higher status, resources, and power."[207] Therefore, the practices of marginalization that are embedded against new-coming migrants allow Russian-speakers to symbolically redefine their self-perception of social hierarchies, thus putting themselves in a position that is equal to the host majority.

---

[203] Alexander Naumov and Sheila Puffer, "Measuring Russian Culture Using Hofstede's Dimensions," *Applied Psychology* 49, no. 4 (2001): 709–18.

[204] Leaked document says 2,000 men allegedly assaulted 1,200 German women on New Year's Eve. Washington Post. URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/07/10/leaked-document-says-2000-men-allegedly-assaulted-1200-german-women-on-new-years-eve/?utm_term=.8b41dac1cd27. (Access date: 19.04.2019)

[205] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL: https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall. Access date: 2019-04-25

[206] Destroyed Europe, #2086. URL: https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1. (Access date: 18.05.2019)

[207] Eva G.T. Green and Christian Staerklé, "Migration and Multiculturalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 868.

5.4. Constructing "civilizational" rhetoric

According to Rogers Brubaker, in the recent years, national-populist political actors of Northern and Western Europe have started to employ the "civilizational" rhetoric thus redefining the division between "them" and "others" around the notion of "civilizational threat" from Islam. [208] Thus, it led to the appearance of a specific set of identity categories that use the Christian secularism, rejection of anti-Semitism and the liberal rhetoric in order to build the distinctions.[209] In this regard, it is particularly important to analyze how the process of "othering" and the reconstruction of the group symbolic boundaries relate to the appearance of the new "civilizational" categories.

Symbolic boundaries define the self-identification processes of group members in a situation when multiple boundaries (such as language or human capital) intertwine and form salient categories.[210] Hence, the "others" could be discursively marginalized through a variety of practices that represent them as culturally incompatible, economically excluded, racially different. The linguistic practices of "othering" are very blurred and interconnected. This section considers how the users construct the categories of race, religion, language and culture that present to be the most salient boundaries defining attitudes towards immigrants.[211] It also analyses which categories have more symbolic value for the users.

5.4.1. Racial boundary

In this sub-section, I am interested in how Russian-speaking users employ the notion of "race" as a category that defines their discriminative attitudes. The recent studies have shown that perception of "racial differences" presents to be one of the main factors forming anti-

---

[208] Brubaker, "Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective."
[209] Brubaker.
[210] Bail, "The Configuration of Symbolic Boundaries against Immigrants in Europe," 39.
[211] Bail, "The Configuration of Symbolic Boundaries against Immigrants in Europe."

immigrant views.[212] In the European context, the notion of "race" is highly contested; racism could take a form of "silent" views.[213]

For most of the users in the analyzed discussions, "race" is used as a mean of visual representation of the boundary division between "them" and "others." Therefore, contemporary Europe represents a citadel of the "white race" that is under the invasion of the "yellows" and "blacks."[214]

"In Stuttgart, you can rarely see blondes on the streets. In Frankfurt, there is a street (that leads to the train station) which does not have white faces at all. <…> in Hamburg I have seen black "thesearethechildren" that screamed and did not give way to anybody."[215] "Blacks are life owners."[216]

The words "blacks," "refugees," "Muslims" are often used in such type of discriminative rhetoric as interchangeable categories. There is a shared view that the notion of "refugee" is highly interconnected with skin colour, rather than with legal status. For this reason, the discourse of marginalization often extends to other ethnic minorities living in Germany. While describing their vision of "unsafe" Germany, many users emphasize an appearance of ethnic clustered districts that present to be equal to the notion of "invasion." In this regard, all the ethnic minorities living in Germany are put in the same marginalized category of "others." The following quotes illustrate the way how users employ this type of discriminative repertoire:

"Have you been in any of the public parks that are filled with Negro bazaars? Have you ever walked on the Alex [Alexander Platz] in the evening? Have you visited the Arab or Turkish

---

[212] Gorodzeisky and Semyonov, "Not Only Competetive Threat But Also Racial Prejudice: Sources of Anti-Immigrant Attitudes in European Societies."
[213] Bail, "The Configuration of Symbolic Boundaries against Immigrants in Europe."
[214] Destroyed Europe, #588. URL: https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1 (Access date: 20.03.2019)
[215] Destroyed Europe, #1024. URL: https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1 (Access date: 20.03.2019)
[216] Destroyed Europe, #2760. URL: https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1 (Access date: 20.03.2019)

districts in the centre of Berlin? Went to these cities at night, enjoying their beauty and safety?"[217]

Or

"<…> Please, understand that 2/3 of the train passengers are not "ours." Buses? The same song! And all these drivers, they are Negros too! <…> When I saw it in the first time, I thought I would die from the heart attack. He was black, absolutely black in the black T-shirt. <…> and the same Negros are now cashiers in the shop! Where did they come from? So fast, and so much!"[218]

Therefore, the racial division on "white" and "non-white" is present in the overwhelming majority of all the analyzed messages. While describing the "refugees," many users refer to such notions as "the preservation of the white race" thus relating themselves to the same category:

"This is the question of preservation of the white race!!! It is not a secret that "yellows" and "blacks" reproduce as animals. We need to protect ourselves!"[219]

According to Raymond Taras, even though Islamophobia is often framed as religiously-based prejudices, in recent years with the spread of civilizational rhetoric, the cultural and religious practices are more and more racialized.[220] In the case of the Russian-language online platforms, the racial categorization plays the role of visual boundary that distinguishes "them" from "others." Many users employ the dichotomic category "white – non-white" as a way to describe their vision of "Fortress Europe." For example, the user Sol-perez emphasized her "acceptable" image of Europe:

---

[217] Destroyed Europe, #19274. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1
(Access date: 20.03.2019)
[218] Destroyed Europe, #183. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1
(Access date: 20.03.2019)
[219] Destroyed Europe, #588 . URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1
(Access date: 20.03.2019)
[220] Raymond Taras, "'Islamophobia Never Stands Still': Race, Religion, and Culture," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2012.

"The "Madeleine" catalogue has moved again the blond models on the backward pages, now the cover and the first three-quarters of the catalogue – "superbeauty" of the Sudanese-Somali origin, with the so-called "face."
I have long itchy hands to write them not to send me their catalogues anymore because I live in Europe and I have a typical European appearance, so most of their models do not suit me. It's a pity that my German is not so perfect, so I cannot clearly express my idea and not to pay a fine for the lack of tolerance."[221]

As the abovementioned quote shows, this user feels its belonging to "white Europe" while any "non-white" appearance makes her feel aggressive. At the same time, despite feeling "European" the user's knowledge of German does not allow her to unsubscribe from the mailing of catalogues.

Physical differences that are defined as "racial differences" play a significant role in constructing anti-immigrant attitudes among the Russian-speaking users. Eric Kaufmann also claims that the consolidation of the "Whiteshift" – a set of myths and discourses underlying the belonging to "White identity" – could be a reaction to the rising right-wing populist agenda[222] and a part of the civilizational repertoire.

5.4.2. Culture

In the center of civilizational rhetoric lie the notions of culture and heritage that allows national populist actors to embed a specific set of discursive features related to national belonging and shared traditions.[223] At the same time, the way how the majority estimates the level of migrant groups' assimilation is often considered to be a constituency of anti-immigrant views. [224] In other words, the more unassimilated migrants are perceived to be, the

---

[221] Sol-perez#1737. The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 19.04.2019)
[222] Eric Kaufmann, *Whiteshift: Populism, Immigration, and the Future of White Majorities* (Overlook Press, 2019).
[223] Ayhan Kaya and Ayse Tecmen, "Europe versus Islam: Populist Discourse and the Construction of a Civilizational Idenitity," *Critical Heritages (CoHERE): Performing and Representing Identities in Europe*, 2018, 3.
[224] Raymond Taras, "'Islamophobia Never Stands Still': Race, Religion, and Culture," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2012.

more likely they would face prejudices.[225] Being primary sources of "social, cultural and political identification,"[226] the concepts of cultural integration and language proficiency lie at the core of symbolic boundaries' formation.

To justify the boundary division, Russian-speaking users employ the notion of "cultural differences" as a way to describe distinctions in everyday practices that are considered to be the signs of "incapability" with the host society. Prejudiced views often appear when users discuss the increasing violent crime rate in Germany.[227] Many members of the discussions blame ethnically segregated districts in being "fertile ground" for committing crimes. Contrary to the "Russian" cities, such areas are described as symbols of the "invasion."[228]

The notion of "cultural incapability" is often understood as "different" or "uncultured" social behaviour. For many users, fleeing a country with an ongoing military conflict is defined as "cowardice" that is "not a part of our European culture." This is exemplified in the VK dialogue between one user and a Syrian man, who wrote in Russian how he applied for asylum in Germany. The reason why Syrian man has decided to share his story is that he came across a lot of discriminative comments in the Russian-language groups that he uses as the primary source for mediation after studying in Moscow around ten years ago. The man wrote an optimistic message, stating that he believes that everyone should respect and love each other. According to him, some of his co-patriots could indeed show "unacceptable behavior," like any other member of any other ethnic group. Afterward, he faced with extreme aggression from the other users:

[225] Raymond Taras, "'Islamophobia Never Stands Still': Race, Religion, and Culture," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2012.
[226] Rogers Brubaker, "Language, Religion and the Politics of Difference," *Nations and Nationalism* 19, no. 1 (2013): 1–20.
[227] Destroyed Europe, #3297. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1
(Access date: 20.03.2019)
[228] Destroyed Europe, #3297. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1
(Access date: 20.03.2019)

"This is a position of coward jackals! If you have a war in your country, you need to think about children first! Otherwise, God forbid, you will not be able to save one."[229]

This dialogue illustrates that by employing a stereotypic vision of "acceptable" behavior, users are trying to exclude the new-coming group from the right to resettle in Germany.

In many ways, "cultural incapability" is described as "noncompliance with democratic norms" and European values. In these cases, users connect behavioral patterns with the lack of integration and knowledge about European values:

"Europe has received thousands of people with another religion and culture, and nobody does ANYTHING to put them in the framework of European values – and that is, first of all, is socially acceptable behaviour and respect to the local law. Nobody does that and everyone just being hysterical. Turks were not taught that Albans were not taught that, and now the devils moved in."[230]

Therefore, many users cultivate differences between "them" and the "others" through a civilizational repertoire. "Democracy" presents to be an ideal model of state governance in situations when users discursively marginalize the "others" or define the beginning of the "refugee crisis." In the analyzed VK discussion, one user described the cause of the "crisis" with a lack of democratic governance in Germany:

"Did somebody democratically asked the democratic population in democratic Germany in the referendum if they want to accept refugees or not? No, they did not! Because everyone would be against it. That is why they undemocratically accept them, and that is all."[231]

From the one hand, users employ the category of "democracy" as an ideal model of state governance in order to contrast Europe to "Muslim civilization." From the other hand, the same users mention that "European values" and "tolerance" do not exist not only as

---

[229] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL: https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall. (Access date: 19.04.2019)

[230] Риджио#1335. The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. URL: https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11.06.2018)

[231] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL: https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall. (Access date: 25.04.2019)

notions but also as practical terms thus constructing controversial statements. Hence, dissatisfaction with democracy in Germany presents to be one of the most popular topics that migrants discuss on an everyday basis. The failure of German politics is often considered to be the origin for the refugee crisis, which is defined as the major problem in contemporary Europe. The level of mistrust to politicians is also very high and coincide with the general support for the right-wing populism. All respondents for the present research mentioned that they have no belief in the European values; some even defined it as "anti-human and anti-comfortable notions."[232] As one of the participants mentioned:

"Democracy means permissiveness. Democracy here is ostentatious; propaganda works very well + the authoritarian leader, so we cannot talk about any free will here."[233]

According to Marquart-Pyatt and Paxton, the low level of belief in tolerance among resident minorities could derive from a lack of involvement in democratic practices or systems.[234] Rahsaan Maxwell also claims that the level of political trust and satisfaction with the national government presents to be one of the leading indicators for defining the level of migrant political representation in society.[235] At the same time, in all the analyzed online platforms as well as interviews, the described notion of "cultural incapability" has not implied language proficiency. The "cultural aspect" is based on commonly shared views on the norms of social behavior, which is strongly interconnected with "civilizational" vision of race, culture, and religion.

5.4.3. Religion

In the center of the "civilizational" rhetoric lies the politicized perception of Islamic practices. In the analyzed discussion, the notions of "Islam" is often substituted with the notion of "refugees." Thus, the current "refugee crisis" is often associated with the "Muslim

---

[232] Economic migrant from Russia (female), interview: 12.12.2017.
[233] Economic migrant from Russia (female), interview: 12.12.2017.
[234] "In Principle and in Practice: Learning Political Tolerance in Eastern and Western Europe," *Political Behavior* 29, no. 1 (2007): 89–113.
[235] "Evaluating Migrant Integration: Political Attitudes Across Generations in Europe," *International Migration Review* 44, no. 1 (2010): 26.

invasion." Depending on the context, the Turkish population in Germany could be either on one or another side of the symbolic boundary reconstruction. Although many define the second largest migrant group in Germany as "our Muslims," other users still put them in the same category as the "others":

"Well, Turks wanted to occupy Germany without any competitors. But now they have Africans, people from the Middle East. They destroyed all plans for the poor Turks."[236]

The contested category of "our Muslims" could be observed in the discussions about Muslim migrants from the former Socialist bloc. Some users state explicitly that a comparison between them and new-coming refugees is impossible since the first ones "were able to adopt, we do not hear or see them" [237] while the "others" "do not feel like being at home and they do not want to. And they try to impose here their own way of life."[238] These quotes illustrate that in some cases, cultural boundary that is often understood as similarity in everyday practices and traditions is stronger than racial and religious ones. Despite being non-White Muslims, post-Soviet migrants from Kazakhstan are perceived to be as belonging to the same group.

"I was born and spent all my childhood in Kazakhstan. These are our Muslims in contrast to those who invade Europe right now."[239]

However, this conclusion does not apply to all the users since, for some of them the religious boundary defining "Muslims" and "Christians" present to be the strongest one. In these cases, users usually refer to Russia, which they consider as an example of "infected

[236] Destroyed Europe, #1317. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1
(Access date: 20.03.2019)
[237] Destroyed Europe, #1914. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1
(Access date: 20.03.2019)
[238] Destroyed Europe, #1485. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1
(Access date: 20.03.2019)
[239] Destroyed Europe, #1914. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1
(Access date: 20.03.2019)

multiculturalism"[240] due to the formation of national republics in the 1990s. The following post gained 10 likes in the VK discussion:

"Islam is a new fascism; they are all our enemies. By the way, in Russia they have a ticking time bomb set by Kadyrov, he is already number two after Putin. So, it's everybody's concern. It is not without reason that Hitler liked Muslims so much, Islam is a black plague, and it is treated with death."[241]

Thus, the perception of Islam among Russian-speaking users in Germany is strongly linked to the perception of "cultural incompatibilities" and racial differences. Although Islamic religious practices are often seen as a critical reason for "misbehavior," refugees are marginalized through a combination of "civilizational" discursive features that allow Russian-speakers to recategorize their position in the host society.

In the analyzed discussions, Russian speakers often refer to the "civilizational rhetoric"[242] that prescribes to "Christian" and "Muslim" worlds a set of cultural and religious practices the differences in which are often seen as "incompatible."[243] This coincides with the contemporary political discourse of the national-populist parties that by referring to the "civilizational differences" try to redefine the boundaries of the "Fortress Europe."

5.4.4. Constructing the notion of "white Slavic Christianism"

As was shown in the previous sections, symbolic boundaries present to be highly contested flexible categories that in the case of reshaping could lead to the radicalization of discursive features that are used to maintain the boundary division. In the case of the Russian-speaking migrant users in Germany, the appearance of the "others" has not only changed dichotomic division between "them" and the "others" but also led to the reconstruction of

---

[240] Destroyed Europe, #3892. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1
(Access date: 20.03.2019)

[241] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL:
https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall. (Access date: 25.04.2019)

[242] Brubaker, "Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective."

[243] Куды vadis Deutschland? URL: https://www.facebook.com/groups/kudyvadis/ (Access date: 25.05.2019)

self-perception and appearance of the new identity category related to the "white Slavic Christianism." This inclusionary category allows users to redefine the boundary division and include the Russian-speaking group irrelated to their ethnical belonging to a new imagined community[244] the cultural practices of which are built around exclusion of refugees from the symbolic space of "white Europe."

This point can be illustrated with the example of online relations between migrants from Ukraine and Russia that after the 2013 Russia's political campaign in Crimea have tended to reproduce the same debates in cyberspace as in the home countries. These debates were especially visible in the online space of the analyzed SNS, where many discussions threads were created supporting one or another side. However, with the appearance of the new "others" in 2015, the symbolic boundary was reconstructed from "ethnic" lines to a more inclusionary category. The following quote demonstrates the boundary division lines – even despite the heated political conflict in both countries, these debates are not produced in the same media space where the new "others" are discussed:

"I live in Germany as a refugee from Ukraine. Most of the applications from Ukrainian refugees are rejected, while Syrian are always accepted."
She received an answer:
"You are not black enough))))"[245]

In the analyzed SNS, the Ukrainian refugees are not defined as victims of military conflict between Russia and Ukraine, but rather in opposition to Syrians who pretend over the same state resources. The discriminated position of Ukrainian refugees in relation to Syrians is therefore widely acknowledged and shared even by users who actively supported Russia'

---

[244] Martin Sökefeld, "Mobilizing in Transnational Space: A Social Movement Approach to the Formation of Diaspora," *Global Networks* 6, no. 3 (2006): 265–84.
[245] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL: https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall. (Access date: 16.03.2019)

political actions in Crimea.[246] This case presents a particular interest for the present research since it demonstrates the general group self-identification as "white Slavic Christians" that is equal to "good migrants." Users often employ the notion of "Slavic power" as an alternative to the "European future."[247] The following quote illustrates the user's self-reflection on his ethnic preferences:

"Imagine that you stand in the supermarket and you have several open cash registers. If I have to choose to which cashier I would go and pay for my purchase, I would definitely go to the Slavic one (UKRAINIAN), then German, South African… <…> If I have a choice, I would not go to a Turkish one. Although some of them are amazingly beautiful, they are alien… I do not want to lose Europe."[248]

Moreover, the notion of culture is often associated with the pan-European "practices" to which Russian-speakers belong to as a part of "white Slavic Christian group." This type of discursive features often coincides with what Brubaker calls "identitarian "Christianism" – liberal rhetoric aiming to counterbalance the liberal notions of gender equality, gay rights and freedom of speech to Muslim culture.[249] The following quote illustrates how user employs this type of rhetoric in their everyday discourse:

"The Turks do not even want to marry German women – they are too emancipated for them; can you imagine that??? They do not respect European values!"[250]

Or

"They come to break the laws and destroy OUR CULTURE AND SECURITY. For them democracy it is nonsense, they do not respect our rights and freedom! They do not respect the natives!"[251]

---

[246] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL: https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall. (Access date: 25.04.2019)

[247] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL: https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall. (Access date: 25.04.2019)

[248] Destroyed Europe, #1910. URL: https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1 (Access date: 20.03.2019)

[249] Brubaker, "Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective."

[250] Respondent 2. Interview: 25.11.2018

[251] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL: https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall. (Access date: 25.04.2019)

The reconstruction of the sense of belonging is highly interconnected with reconfiguration of symbolic boundaries towards including the group in the category equal to "majority." The self-identification practices of "white Slavic Christian group" present to be an inclusionary category that emphasizes the division into "civilizational" lines. The following quote summarizes the shared vision on this issue:

"Russians behave very similarly with other Eastern Europeans. We differ significantly from Germans, but from Poles, for example, we differ only politically and a little bit – linguistically. Caucuses and Arabs think and act like they are from the other planet. We cannot find the common language with them even if they are developed intellectually."[252]

The other user continued that statement with describing the situation in his neighborhood. The following quote illustrates how the category of "ethnicity" was replaced with the category of "Christianism:"

"No one asks what Europeans wish. Our city is not German anymore. Can you imagine that 10 years ago it was a purely German city, and now it is the Albanian-Turkish refugee town? The only Germans who are still here – they own properties that they cannot sell. Or they don't want to. They are all older people.
In general, there no white faces left.
We moved to a German house, and now *we are only Christians left*."[253]

Hence, the identity category of "white Slavic Christianism" and references to the upcoming "Slavic power" can be considered as an attempt of users to recategorize their self-perception and legitimatize their own anti-refugee views. Marine Laruelle also mentioned the reoccurrence of Slavic identification among contemporary nationalist movements in Russia[254] that could also have indirect influence on the discourse formation.

---

[252] Chto dumaete na temu o bezhentsakh kotorykh vse bol'she prinimaet Germaniia? Za ili protiv? [What do you think about refugees that Germany tends to accept more and more? Are you in or out? URL: https://vk.com/rusgermany?w=wall-22450239_6026%2Fall. (Access date: 25.04.2019)
[253] Destroyed Europe, #1984. URL: https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31960722.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5&part=974&vc=1 (Access date: 20.03.2019)
[254] Laruelle, "The Ideological Shift on the Russian Radical Right."

5.5. Justifying the right-wing populism

The following section aims to consider how the actor of "civilizational" rhetoric in Germany, the right-wing populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), is reconstructed in the Russian-language online space. In 2017, the self-mobilization practices of the Russian-speaking residents in Germany coincided with the growing role of the right-wing populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). Although Rogers Brubaker mentioned that the AfD does not belong to the "cluster of civilizationist national populisms" due to its dispersed character and unsettled anti-Muslim rhetoric, [255] the recent studies have shown that at the core of the party's anti-Muslim agenda lies highly politicized perception of religion "as the cornerstone of German and European culture."[256]

Following the rising rhetoric of populist agenda all over the European Union, the AfD has become the first political party in Germany that mobilized the Russian-speaking communities intentionally. By putting the posters in Russian, organizing the rallies in Russian as well as continually underlying its "pro-Russian" character, the AfD gained support among Russian-speaking population and, mainly, among ethnic resettlers constituting the leading Russian-speaking migrant group with German citizenship. The following poster was hanging in the streets of Hamburg in 2017. It states: "Be brave to stand for Germany and our children! An uninvited guest is worse than a Tatar! Protect the borders, send out the Islamists!":

---

[255] Brubaker, "Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective," 1193.

[256] Kaya and Tecmen, "Europe versus Islam: Populist Discourse and the Construction of a Civilizational Idenitity."

Figure 3. The AfD propaganda poster that was hanging in the streets of Hamburg, 2017[257]

Although it is hard to estimate the actual number of Russian-Germans who voted for the AfD in the Bundestag elections of 2017, Dennies Spies provides quantitative and qualitative findings regarding the changing voting behaviours of the Russian-Germans, claiming that around 15-17 % of all Russian-speaking respondents at exit polls voted for the AfD.[258] The following section aims to consider how pro-AfD attitudes are reflected in the online discourse.

5.5.1. *"The AfD is a devil which is not as black as it is painted"*

The discussion "The AfD is a devil which is not as black as it is painted" has started in the forum "Germany in Russian" in April 2017 with the user "oldfish" who has a "lodger" status which proves his constant engagement with the forum on an everyday basis. It has rapidly become one of the most popular discussion threads in the forum with 227 681 web browsing. Oldfish – who has an icon of the old Soviet actor as a profile picture – stated that the major political parties in Germany the Cristian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social

---

[257] Die AfD schaltet nun offenbar auch Wahlwerbung im russischen Staatsfernsehen. URL: https://www.buzzfeed.com/de/marcusengert/die-afd-schaltet-nun-offenbar-auch-wahlwerbung-im (Access date: 20.05.2019)

[258] Achim Goerres, Sabrina Mayer, and Dennis Spies, "Immigrant Voters against Their Will: A Focus Group Analysis of Identities, Political Issues and Party Allegiances among German Resettlers during the 2017 Bundestag Election Campaign," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 2018, 1–18.

Democratic Party (SDP) equate the AfD with the "far-right parties" and blame it in populism because of their own inability to manage domestic policy in Germany and fear that the AfD can make any real changes. Then the oldfish discusses the party program. For instance, the author comments the statement "Islam does not belong to Germany" by saying:

"Racial and religious tolerance in Europe led to a situation when many Islamists began to behave as owners of the country. Mass rapes committed by people from Arab republics, fights and attacks on women with loose hair – it is not the whole list of actions that migrants do. The AfD just made it clear that it thinks that sharia is incompatible with the European values"[259].

As an online platform for minority communication, the forum remains a place where participants can anonymously express their political views, tell about their hopes and desires, discuss economic and social agenda. The forum, therefore, plays multi-functioned roles and remains a multitask space. The discussion started with a debate on whether AfD is populist or not. Some members were triggered with a comparison of the AfD with populism/far-right movements. In response, these members stated that the party's program does not have anything to do with "populist movements" because it tells the truth about contemporary German place in the world politics and gives a voice to the "refugee problem." For them, populism is perceived to be a synonym for a "lie." By placing the AfD program on the other edge, these users justify their support for the party by claiming that AfD reflects the current problems in Germany. For example, user Риджио was among the first who reacted on the post:

"I do not see any populism here. Germany has one of the leading economies in Europe, every country listens to its voice, and it was Germany that together with France made the main efforts to create the European Union. Why everything has conversed now? I think that the AfD does not have any populist ideas."[260]

---

[259] Oldfish, #1. The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. URL: https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11.06.2018)

[260] Риджио #2, The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. URL: https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11.06.2018)

Other stated that the AfD might be populist, but they do not see anything terrible in it. As user Roslyz claimed, and many others tended to agree with him/her: "Nobody associates the AfD with the Nazis – otherwise the party would be banned. It is more right populists. <…> Populist does not mean Nazi or ultra-right, do not worry! Populism presents in all the parties."[261] The confusion in understanding of populism term can be also clearly seen in this discussion: "There is nothing bad or scary in populism – it is just a reflection of people's aspiration"[262] (the message was deleted after three months) and the direct response to that: "I understand this term in a different way, more like empty promises which are given in response to people's aspirations, but not subjected to perform."[263]

One of the respondents for this research and a co-founder of several Facebook groups such as "Russians stand for the AfD" (345 followers), emigrated to Germany under the Jewish resettlement program. While explaining his political preferences, he mentioned that he feels a direct threat that the Muslim population could cause to him, and comparing to that threat, the AfD presents to be the only right political choice:

"I am not an Orthodox Jew; I do not wear the kippah. However, whenever I come near the synagogue, I can physically feel how *they* [refugees] stare at me. I am afraid of them. I feel like they are going to make some huge pogroms in the future. I know one case when they have beaten a local rabbi in Frankfurt."

The other respondents also reflected on the rising popularity of the AfD among Russian-speaking groups:

"Why did Russian-speaking residents in Germany vote for the AfD? Because Russian-Germans know what it is like to live in a totalitarian state, we do not want socialism anymore! We know what evil is."[264]

---

[261] Rozlyz, #10. The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. URL: https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11.06.2018)

[262] Van Doren #14, The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. URL: https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11.06.2018)

[263] Риджио #19, The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. URL: https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11.06.2018)

[264] Ethnic German repatriate, interview: 25.10.2018.

Or

 "The AfD was the first party that paid attention to them. For this reason, many Russian-Germans joined the party and started running for office in their regions. For many years, nobody talked to them on the political level – and then they were heard."

As Rogers Brubaker pointed out, contemporary populism presents to be a category of analysis, discursive and stylistic repertoire[265] that is embedded in the discourse of almost all major political parties. What unites all of the populist actors is the four-dimensional dichotomy defining the discourse between "we" vs "others" and "we" vs "corrupt elite." By discussing the possible belonging of the AfD to populism, the majority of all members tended to justify its seemingly discriminative policy by referring to all of the four dimensions. The discourse-political function of the forum, therefore, appears in its ability to express opinions and take part in political debates. The anonymous character of the messages allows making additional accents or emphasis on topics that people usually confuse to discuss in real life, like the support of populism or the far-right movements. In this case, the situation is double-edged since the controversy of the topic and open author's position regarding the AfD allowed members of the community to give their voice to the party without being afraid to be excluded.

Many users explained their support for the AfD with the unsatisfactory political climate in Germany that presents to be "undemocratic." According to such users, the Cristian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) do not give a chance to other parties to change "the rules of the game"[266] and many people expressed their intentions to vote for the AfD out of the protest[267]: "I will vote for them out of protest anyway. And for

[265] Rogers Brubaker, "Why Populism?," *Theory and Society* 46, no. 5 (2017): 357–85.

[266] Oldfish, #22; Jastin2000, #33; The AFD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11. 06. 2018)

[267] Andrej7788 #39, Zuckerватте, #40; Romel #49, vhde #176, лавренти #182,*, The AFD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11. 06. 2018)

nobody else. I am sick and tired of these disillusioned politicians."[268] Some members mentioned an inability of Germans to understand that when one person is re-elected several times, all institutions began to promote his/her candidature: "now all German parties support decisions of the Merkel's command. They call it "democratic consensus.""[269]

At the same time, one can observe a considerable controversy in the users' responses. From the one hand, many claim that AfD presents to be an alternative to the current undemocratic political regime that betrays the "European values." From the other hand, the same members of the discussions state their disbelief in tolerance by claiming that European inclusiveness led countries to "hell"[270] and the main reason why Germany "plays in multi-culturalism" is the Nazi regime[271]:

"The interesting thing is that "European values" lie between sodomy and Muslim values when blues [slightly pejorative for homosexuals] are bitten with stones in Arabia and Yemen."[272]

When I asked one of the respondents regarding the notion of the "European values," he answered:

"There are no European values, no democracy in Germany. Merkel is an authoritarian dictator. For example, the state pays anti-fa, disperses the rallies; I once saw how police officers hit the crowds. I think that the AfD is so popular because Merkel betrayed the people by propagandizing authoritarian politics, and zombying people to help refugees. Germany does not have any independent media anymore and that is why many Russians here read Russian news. Yes, they also have Putin propaganda, but they tell much more! And German TV does not even invite opposition activists!"[273]

---

[268] janavita* #282, Lotos777 #61, лавренти #157; The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11.06.2018)

[269] Kant_elz #626, The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11.06.2018)

[270] Garpagon, #87, Vhde #171. The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11.06.2018)

[271] Empire B. #343, The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11.06.2018)

[272] V0id*1019. The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. URL:
https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11.06.2018)

[273] Respondent № 1. Interview: 25.11.2018

Moreover, while reading the comments in these sections, the reader has an impression that users believe in a global network of the far-right parties and claim its independence one from another. For example, the users Garpagon and Oguar discussed that success of the AfD totally depends on the elections in France and the party of Marin Le Pen[274] while user Ардальоныч stated that before supporting the AfD a person should know its opinion about the USA as an "elder brother" and "kind policemen" that patronizes Germany[275]. By pointing so, many users noted that they do not believe in German independence and its democratic system.

In the analyzed online space, the AfD, therefore, presents to be the only political alternative to the "mass disorder" that is happening in Germany. The politics of exclusion is justified in the everyday discussions as "the only honest statements reflecting the real situation" while the German politics is represented as "undemocratic," "illiberal" or "authoritarian." The members of online discussions perceive the marginalized character of the party as a sign that party leaders are telling the uncomfortable truth. By explaining their support, many users note that "since the Germans are all blind, we are the ones who can change something."[276]

The discriminative views are deriving from the civilizational discourse that is currently employing by right-wing nationalist parties all across the world. As Marlene Laruelle has argued, Russian nationalist right-wing organizations use the same type of discriminative rhetoric in order to reconstruct the previous anti-Western attitudes to the anti-Islam, thus

---

[274] Garpagon #82, Oguar #83. The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11. 06. 2018)

[275] Ардальоныч, #92. The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11. 06. 2018)

[276] The AfD is a devil that is not as black as it is painted. Germany in Russian. https://foren.germany.ru/discus/f/31782046.html?Cat=&page=0&view=collapsed&sb=5 (Access date: 11. 06. 2018)

putting themselves in the category of "Europe."[277] For this reason, the AfD is reflected in online discussions as the only political alternative to the current regime. In many ways, users tend to support the party's discourse because its rhetoric aimed at emphasizing the importance of the Russian-speaking residents in Germany for German society.

---

[277] Laruelle, "The Ideological Shift on the Russian Radical Right."

CONCLUSION

The present thesis aims to consider the question of why some Russian-speaking residents in Germany have tended to express the anti-refugee attitudes. The second aim of this study was to investigate the role of SNS in forming homogeneous discriminative rhetoric and to analyze the reflection of the right-wing populist mobilization in the online discursive landscape. In order to do it, I have applied the theoretical framework of symbolic boundaries construction that was well-defined in the works of Charles Tilly.[278] It allowed to consider the radicalization of the Russian-speaking migrants in Germany from the perspective of symbolic boundary reshaping.

The study uses netnographic analysis in order to understand the reproduction of cultural patterns and discourses.[279] I have also conducted six semi-structured interviews with the members of the analyzed discussions to gain insights into the commonly discussed issues. For this reason, the present study does not aim to provide a separate qualitative analysis of interviews but to use them on a supplementary basis.

What is the role of SNS in forming homogeneous discriminative rhetoric? For many Russian-speaking residents in Germany, online platforms can constitute imagined communities that recreate practices of nationhood construction. Following this argument, online platforms can also function as self-organized political groups that reproduce mobilizing rhetoric and create a shared homogenized discourse with socially acceptable discriminative stigmas.[280] According to Elizabeth Schilling, SNS allow Russian-speaking migrants in Germany to cope with the loss of identification, social contacts, status, and the financial disadvantages that migrants acquire during the act of crossing the border and adjusting to the

---

[278] Tilly, "Social Boundary Mechanisms."
[279] Kozinets, *Netnography: Redefined*.
[280] Trandafoiu, *Diaspora Online: Identity Politics and Romanian Migrants*.

75

host culture.[281] Therefore, the migrant media could act as assemblage points where users tend to reconstruct their vision on the past, present, and future.

How online discursive features reflect the boundary reshaping process? What categories do users employ in order to construct the notion of the "others?" After the "refugee crisis" of 2015 in Germany, Russian-language SNS have tended to mirror the social mobilization, anti-refugee attitudes, and support for the right-wing populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). Through participation in the discussions dedicated to "refugee crisis," many users have acquired a shared vision on consequences of the mass migration to Europe. One of the reasons for that is the specificity of online communication itself – due to the lack of moderation, perceived anonymity and speed of cyber interaction, many users could reproduce (and co-produce) the negative stigmas that later became acceptable in the analyzed discursive landscapes. In many ways, this is possible due to the migrant involvement in the Runet and official Russian media where the discriminative and often xenophobic views present to be widespread.

The nethnographic analysis of the chosen discussions, as well as conducted interviews with users, have shown that, in many ways, the embedded discursive features of marginalization coincide with the politicized categories of "civilizational rhetoric" that is embedded in the political repertoire of contemporary national populist actors in Northern and Western Europe.[282] At the core of the analyzed discriminative rhetoric lies the dichotomy between Islamic and European cultures, that is defined through the notions of "cultural incapability." Even though users generally express disbelief in democracy and "European values," they employ both notions to illustrate the incapability of Muslims to integrate in Germany thus contrasting "liberal Europe" with the "uncivilized illiberal East."

---

281 Elizabeth Schilling, "Transnational Biography: Reassessment of Personal Biographical Experiences in Internet Forums among Russian Migrants in Germany," *Inter* 7 (2014): 74–84.
282 Brubaker, "Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective."

Initially being marginalized as "others" themselves, Russian-speakers use discriminative rhetoric for symbolic inclusion into the "majority" category through the notion of "good migrants" or "white Slavic Christians." The perceived competition that is mainly observed in the discourse of ethnic German resettlers amplified the boundary reshaping process. Consequently, in the SNS, the process was reflected in the form of war rhetoric. The new-coming migrants are, therefore, marginalized through a variety of discursive features including racial differences, "cultural incapability," Islamic religious practices.[283] Overall, this thesis argues that anti-immigrant attitudes in the Russian-language SNS present to be homogeneous, socially acceptable stigmas. In many observed discussions, the category of "cultural incapability" presents to be the most salient one. It usually coincides with racial and religious prejudices, therefore dividing the world culture according to "civilizational" lines.[284]

How is the right-wing populist mobilization reflected in the discursive landscape? The AfD, in this case, is perceived to be the only political party that is able to deal with the upcoming issue of the "culturally inappropriate Muslims." The support for the party derives from general dissatisfaction with democracy in Germany and a desire to be represented in the political life of the host society.

Taken together, the findings suggest that with the appearance of the new "others" with the so-called "refugee crisis" in 2015, some Russian-speaking migrants in Germany have employed the politicized category of "civilizational discourse" in order to shift the existing categorizations. This led to the reconstruction of the sense of belonging and appearance of the new identity category of "white Slavic Christianism" that many users embed as a way of justifying their discriminative views. Being previously marginalized themselves, Russian-speaking users, hence, are trying to relocate the new "others" in the marginalized position.

[283] Tilly, "Social Boundary Mechanisms."
[284] Brubaker, "Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective."

77

As Tamara Trost has noted, although the study of online discourse does not allow to analyze the whole spectrum of the group attitudes,[285] it still shows that at least part of the group shares the vision that is inscribed online.[286] The salient categories of civilizational rhetoric towards the "others" that are presented in the online space of the Russian-language online platforms in Germany allow members of these groups acquire the shared vision and formulate attitudes towards minorities.

The present research has investigated, for the first time, the reasons lying behind the online populist activity of Russian-speaking residents in Germany. Taking into consideration the transnational character of the observed SNS,[287] further research needs to be carried out to determine to what extent "civilizational" rhetoric substitutes existing categorizations among the other Russian-speaking migrant groups; and how this can correlate with the increasing role of the right-wing populist parties.

.

---

[285] Trost and Kovacevic, "Football, Hooliganism and Nationalism: The Reaction to Serbia's Gay Parade in Reader Commentary Online."
[286] Trost and Kovacevic.
[287] Elias and Shoren-Zeltser, "Immigrants of the World Unite?"

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adamson, Fiona. "Constructing the Diaspora: Diaspora Identity Politics and Transnational Social Movements," 2008.

Alexeev, Mikhail. "Majority and Minority Xenophobia in Russia: The Importance of Being Titulars." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 26, no. 2 (2010): 89–120.

Alonso, Andoni, and Pedro Oiarzabal, eds. *Diasporas in the New Media Age. Identity, Politics and Community*. University of Nevada Press, 2010.

Amichai-Hamburger, Yair. "Internet and Personality." In *The Social Net*, 1–21. Oxford University Press, 2013.

———, ed. *The Social Net. Understanding Our Online Behaviour*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Appollonia, Ariane Chebel d'. *The Ends of European Colonial Empires. Cases and Comparisons. Migrant Mobilization and Securitization in the US and Europe. How Does It Feel to Be a Threat?* Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Bail, Christopher. "The Configuration of Symbolic Boundaries against Immigrants in Europe." *American Sociological Review* 73 (2008): 37–59.

Barth, Fredrik. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Waveland Press, 1969.

Baser, Bahar. *Diasporas and Homeland Conflicts: A Comparative Perspective*. Routledge, 2016.

Bernal, Victoria. "Diaspora, Cyberspace and Political Imagination: The Eritrean Diaspora Online." *Global Networks* 6, no. 2 (2006): 161–79.

Bliuc, Ana-Maria, Andrew Jakubowicz, and Craig McGarty. "Online Networks of Racial Hate: A Systematic Review of 10years of Research on Cyber-Racism." *Computers in Human Behavior* 87 (2018): 75–86.

Braghiroli, Stefano, and Andrey Makarychev. "Redefining Europe: Russia and the 2015 Refugee Crisis." *Geopolitics* 23, no. 4 (2018): 823–48.

Breuer, Anita, Todd Landman, and Dorothea Farquhar. "Social Media and Protest Mobilization: Evidence from the Tunisian Revolution." *Democratization* 22, no. 4 (2015).

Brinkerhoff, Jennifer. *Digital Diasporas: Idenitty and Transnational Engagement*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Brubaker, Rogers. "Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 8 (2017): 1191–1226.

———. "Language, Religion and the Politics of Difference." *Nations and Nationalism* 19, no. 1 (2013): 1–20.

———. "Why Populism?" *Theory and Society* 46, no. 5 (2017): 357–85.

Bucher, A., and A. Helmond. "The Affordances of Social Media Platforms." In *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, 233–52. Sage Publications, 2018.

Chouliaraki, Lilie. *Self-Mediation. New Media, Citizenship and Civil Selves*. London: Routledge, 2017.

Cunningham, David. "Mobilizing Ethnic Competition." *Theory and Society* 41, no. 5 (2012): 505–25.

Darieva, Tsypylma. "Recruiting for the Nation: Post-Soviet Transnational Migrants in Germany and Kazakhstan." In *Rebuilding Identities. Pathways to Reform in Post-Soviet Siberia.*, 153–72. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2005.

Deibert, Robert, John Palfrey, Rafal Rohozinski, and Jonathan Zittrain, eds. *Access Controlled. The Shaping of Power, Rights, and Rule in Cyberspace*. The MIT Press, 2010.

Dietz, Barbara, and Pavel Polian. "The Jewish Emigration from the Former Soviet Union to Germany." *International Migration* 40, no. 2 (June 2002): 29–48.

Dijck, José. "Users like You? Theorizing Agency in User-Generated Content." *Media, Culture and Society* 31 (2009): 41–58.

Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. The Free Press, 1995.

Elias, Nell, and Marina Shoren-Zeltser. "Immigrants of the World Unite?" *Journal of International Communitcation* 12, no. 2 (2006): 70–90.

Fialkova, L. "Emigrants from the FSU and the Russian-Language Internet." *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* 12 (2005). http://sites.utoronto.ca/tsq/12/fialkova12.shtml.

Fuchs, Christian. "Racism, Nationalism and Right-Wing Extremism Online: The Austrian Presidential Election 2016 on Facebook." In *Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism*. University of Wesminster Press, 2018.

Gabdulhakov, Rashid. "Russian Media Discourse on Syrian Refugees in Europe and Central Asian Labour Migrants in Russia: Russia for Russians, Europe For...?" *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs* 42 (2016): 3–33.

Gattinara, Pietro Castelli. "Europeans, Shut the Borders! Anti-Refugee Mobilization in Italy and France." In *Solidarity Mobilizations in the 'Refugee Crisis" : Contentious Moves*, 271–99. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Goerres, Achim, Sabrina Mayer, and Dennis Spies. "Immigrant Voters against Their Will: A Focus Group Analysis of Identities, Political Issues and Party Allegiances among German Resettlers during the 2017 Bundestag Election Campaign." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 2018, 1–18.

Goerres, Achim, Dennis Spies, and Staffan Kumlin. "The Electoral Supporter Base of the Alternative for Germany." *Swiss Political Science Review*, 2017.

Gorodzeisky, A., A. Glikman, and D. Maskileyson. "The Nature of Anti-Immigrant Sentiment in Post-Socialist Russia." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 31, no. 2 (2015): 115–35.

Gorodzeisky, Anastasia, and Moshe Semyonov. "Not Only Competetive Threat But Also Racial Prejudice: Sources of Anti-Immigrant Attitudes in European Societies." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 28, no. 3 (2015): 331–54.

Green, Eva G.T., and Christian Staerklé. "Migration and Multiculturalism." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 852–90. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Hainmueller, Jens, and Daniel Hopkins. "Public Attitudes toward Immigration." *Annual Review of Political Science* 17 (2014).

Hampton, Keith. "Social Media and the 'Spiral of Silence.'" PewResearch Internet Project, 2014.

Helmus, Todd, Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, Andrew Radin, Madeline Magnuson, William Marcellino, Andriy Bega, and Zev Winkelman. *Russian Social Media Influence. Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe*. RAND Corporation, 2018.

Hill, Symon. *Digital Revolutions: Activism in the Internet Age*. New Internationalist Publications Ltd, 2013.

Hooghe, Marc, and Thomas De Vroome. "The Perception of Ethnic Diversity and Anti-Immigrant Sentiments: A Multilevel Analysis of Local Communities in Belgium." In *Cities, Diversity and Ethnicity. Politics, Governance and Participation*, 37–56. Routledge, 2016.

Janghorban, Roksana, Robab Roudsari, and Ali Taghipour. "Skype Interviewing: The New Generation of Online Synchronous Interview in Qualitative Research." *International Journal of Qualtative Studies on Health and Well-Being*, 2014, 1–2.

Jansen, Robert. "Populist Mobilization: A New Theoretical Approach to Populism." *Sociological Theory* 29, no. 2 (2011): 75–96.

Jenkins, Henry, and Joshua Green. *Spreadable Media. Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. New York University Press, 2013.

Kahn, Kimberly, Katherine Spencer, and Jack Glaser. "Online Prejudice and Discrimination: From Dating to Hating." In *The Social Net*, 201–20. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Kaufmann, Eric. *Whiteshift: Populism, Immigration, and the Future of White Majorities*. Overlook Press, 2019.

Kaya, Ayhan, and Ayse Tecmen. "Europe versus Islam: Populist Discourse and the Construction of a Civilizational Idenity." *Critical Heritages (CoHERE): Performing and Representing Identities in Europe*, 2018, 1–27.

Koinova, Maria. "Sustained vs Episodic Mobilization among Conflict-Generated Diasporas." *International Political Science Review* 37, no. 5 (2015): 500–516.

Kolstø, Pål. "The New Russian Diaspora - an Identity of Its Own? Possible Identity Trajectories for Russians in the Former Soviet Republic." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 19, no. 3 (1996): 609–39.

Konradova, Natalya, and Henrike Schmidt. "From the Utopia of Autonomy to a Political Battlefield: Towards a History of the 'Russian Internet.'" In *Digital Russia*, 34–55. Routledge, 2016.

Koomen, Willem, and Joop Van der Pligt. *The Psychology of Radicalization and Terrorism*. Routlege, 2016.

Kozinets, Robert. *Netnography: Redefined*. Sage Publications, 2015.

Kuntsman, Adi. "Webs of Hate in Diasporic Cyberspaces: The Gaza War in the Russian-Language Blogosphere." *Media, War and Conflict* 3, no. 3 (2010): 299–313.

K.W. De Dreu, Carsten, Hillie Aaldering, and Ozum Saygi. "Intergroup Conflict and Negotiating Settlement." In *Social Conflict within and between Groups*, 1–19. Psychology Press, 2014.

Lamont, Michéle, and Virág Molnár. "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences." *Symbolic Boundaries*, no. 28 (2002): 167–95.

Laruelle, Marlene. "The Ideological Shift on the Russian Radical Right." *Problems of Post-Communism* 57, no. 6 (2010): 19–31.

Lund, Stefan. *School Choice, Ethnic Divisions, and Symbolic Boundaries*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Mahmod, Jowan. *Kurdish Diaspora Online: From Imagined Community to Managing Communities*. Springer, 2016.

Malamuth, Neil, Daniel Linz, and René Weber. "The Internet and Aggression: Motivation, Disinhibitory, and Opportunity Aspects." In *The Social Net*, 120–43. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Marquart-Pyatt, Sandra, and Pamela Paxton. "In Principle and in Practice: Learning Political Tolerance in Eastern and Western Europe." *Political Behavior* 29, no. 1 (2007): 89–113.

Maxwell, Rahsaan. "Evaluating Migrant Integration: Political Attitudes Across Generations in Europe." *International Migration Review* 44, no. 1 (2010): 25–52.

Mazzoleni, Gianpietro. "Populism and the Media." In *Twenty First Century Populism*, 49–64. Springer, 2008.

Meng, Katharina, and Ekaterina Protassova. "Young Russian-German Adults 20 Years after Their Repatriation to Germany." In *Integration, Identity and Language Maintenance in Young Immigrants. Russian Germans or German Russians*, 159–97. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2017.

Mitrokhin, Nikolai. "«Sluchai Devochki Lizy»: Russkoiazychnye Storonniki Putina v Germanii i Nemetskii Pravyi Radikalizm." *Neprikosnovennyi Zapas* 3 (2017): 132–46.

Moffitt, Benjamin. *The Global Rise of Populism : Performance, Political Style, and Representation*. Stanford, Calif. : Stanford University Press, 2016, 2016.

Morozov, Evgeny. *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. PublicAffairs, 2012.

Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

Naumov, Alexander, and Sheila Puffer. "Measuring Russian Culture Using Hofstede's Dimensions." *Applied Psychology* 49, no. 4 (2001): 709–18.

Nelli, Elias, and Marina Shorer-Zel'tser. "Moi Adres Ne Dom i Ne Ulitsa: Russkoiazychnaia Diaspora v Internete." *Diasporas* 2 (2008): 178–94.

Oboler, Andre. "The Normalisation of Islamophobia through Social Media: Facebook." In *Islamophobia in Cyberspace. Hate Crimes Go Viral*, 41–63. Routledge, 2016.

O'Reilly, Tim. *What Is Web 2.0?* O'Reilly Media, 2009.

Osman Farah, Abdulkadir. *Transnationalism and Civic Engagement*. Adonis and Abbey Publishing House, 2012.

Panfilov, Oleg. "Rebirth of Russian Nationalism." In *Politics in Russia: A Reader*, 476–82. Sage Publications, 2013.

Pero, Davide, and John Solomos, eds. *Migrant Politics and Mobilization: Exclusion, Engagements, Incorporation*. Vol. 33. Ethnic and Racial Studies, 2010.

Peterson, D. J. *Russia and the Information Revolution*. RAND Corporation, 2005.

Pfetsch, Barbara. "'In Russia We Were Germans, and Now We Are Russians.' - Dilemmas of Identity Formation and and Communication among German-Russian Aussiedler." WZB Berlin Social Science Center, 1999.

Pipiia, Karina. "Ksenofobskie Nastroeniia v Rossiiskom Obshchestvennom Mnenii i Puti Ikh Predotvrashchneniia." Sociologica Centre of the Russian Academy of Science, 2017.

Rahimi, Sadeq, and Raissa Graumans. "Reconsidering the Relationship Between Integration and Radicalization." *Journal for Deradicalization*, no. 5 (2015): 28–62.

Reeskens, Tim, and Wim van Oorshot. "Disentangling the 'New Liberal Dilemma': On the Relation between General Welfare Redistribution Preferences and Welfare Chauvinism." *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 2012.

Roesen, Tine, and Vera Zvereva. "Social Network Sites on the Runet: Exploring Social Communication." In *Digital Russia*, 72–88. Routledge, 2016.

Rojo, Alejandra, and Ronald Ragsdale. "Participation in Electronic Forums: Implications for the Design and Implementation of Collaborative Distributed Multimedia." *Thematics and Informatics* 14, no. 1 (1997): 83–96.

Rowe, Lottie, and Simon Goodman. "'A Stinking Filthy Race of People Inbred with Criminality': Discourse Analysis of Prejudicial Talk about Gypsies in Discussion Forums." *Romani Studies* 24, no. 1 (2014): 25–42.

Sahoo, Alaja, and Johannes De Kruijf, eds. *Indian Transnationalism Online. New Perspectives on Diaspora*. Routledge, 2016.

Sapargaliyev, Daniyar, and Assel Jetmekova. "Using Social Network Vkontakte for Studying Sociology," 2013.

Saunders, Robert. *Ethnopolitics in Cyberspace*. Lexington Books, 2011.

Schilling, Elizabeth. "Transnational Biography: Reassessment of Personal Biographical Experiences in Internet Forums among Russian Migrants in Germany." *Inter* 7 (2014): 74–84.

Schmidt, Henrike, Katy Teubener, and Nils Zyrawski. "Virtual (Re)Unification? Diasporic Cultures on the Russian Internet." In *Control + Shift. Public and Private Usages of the Russian Internet*, 120–47. Books on demand, 2006.

Shirky, Clay. *The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*. Penguin books, 2008.

Simon, Bernd, Frank Reichert, and Olga Grabow. "When Dual Identity Becomes a Liability: Identity and Political Radicalism Among Migrants." *Psychological Science* 24, no. 3 (2013): 251–57.

Sökefeld, Martin. "Mobilizing in Transnational Space: A Social Movement Approach to the Formation of Diaspora." *Global Networks* 6, no. 3 (2006): 265–84.

Spies, Dennis, and Achim Goerres. "How Did Immigrant Voters Vote at the 2017 Bundestag Election? First Results from the Immigrant German Election Study (IMGES)." Universität zu Köln, March 2018.

Strukov, Vlad. "The (Im)Personal Connection: Computational Systems and (Post-)Soviet Cultural History." In *Digital Russia. The Langiage, Culture and Politics of New Media Communication*, 11–34. Routledge, 2016.

Taras, Raymond. "'Islamophobia Never Stands Still': Race, Religion, and Culture." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2012.

Thumim, Nancy. *Self-Representation and Digital Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Tilly, Charles. "Social Boundary Mechanisms." *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 34, no. 2 (2004): 211–36.

Tölölyan, Khachig. "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment." *A Journal of Transnational Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996): 3–36.

Trandafoiu, Ruxandra. *Diaspora Online: Identity Politics and Romanian Migrants*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2013.

Trost, Tamara, and Nikola Kovacevic. "Football, Hooliganism and Nationalism: The Reaction to Serbia's Gay Parade in Reader Commentary Online." *Sport in Society* 16, no. 8 (2013): 1054–76.

Turner, John. *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory*. Basil Blackwell, 1987.

Uffelmann, Dirk. "Is There a Russian Cyber Empire?" In *Digital Russia*, 266–85. Routledge, 2016.

Weber, Max. *Economy and Society*. University of California Press, 1978.

Weiskopf, Inna, and Kathrin Kissau. "Internet and the Integration of Immigrants in Germany and Israel. Characteristics and Potentials." *German Policy Studies* 4, no. 4 (2008): 95–124.