

Article

‘We belong to Estonia’: Influence of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on Russian speakers in Estonia

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Introduction

The Russian military invasion of Ukraine, which started on 24 February 2022, highlighted the importance of capturing a detailed picture of the reality and complexity of the experiences of Russian-speaking populations living in former Soviet states, especially in Eastern Europe. Following the invasion, marginalisation and negative societal attitudes towards Russia have increased dramatically in these societies.

Estonia has a large Russian-speaking population, constituting approximately a quarter of the population. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, many Russian speakers have lived as *de facto* ethnic minorities in newly independent Estonia. When Estonia restored its independence in 1991, approximately one-third of its population was Russian-speaking. Although the Estonian government adopted relatively strict policies towards this group, their condition has improved to a fair degree.

However, the Ukraine War in 2022 drastically changed the situation of Russian speakers in Estonia. Owing to Estonia’s history of occupation by the Soviet Union and its geopolitical situation, the state showed rapid and robust support for Ukrainians and harshly condemned Russia’s aggression. Russia’s brutal aggression in Ukraine and the anti-Russian reaction of the Estonian state and society possibly affected Estonia’s Russian-speaking population. Many Russian speakers in Estonia do not consider having systematic ties with Russia; however, they are not monolithic. Nevertheless, some Russian-speaking populations did not oppose the Russian regime and were not in favour of accepting Ukrainian refugees¹.

Therefore, this article introduces a new concept, namely ‘holders of common cultural codes’, which refers to a group of people that share a(n) (imagined) common cultural background. In so doing, this study demonstrates how the Ukrainian crisis influenced the situation of Russian speakers in Estonia. This

study conducted interview-based research from 24 February to 9 May 2022, in an Estonian border town, Narva, where approximately 96 per cent of inhabitants are Russian-speaking.

This article reveals that the war in Ukraine aggravated the fragmentation of Russian speakers’ communities in Estonia, which had never been fully united. The findings imply that distrust and scepticism among groups of Russian speakers, as well as those with some understanding of Estonia’s critical stance towards Russia, have grown. Moreover, young Russian speakers (aged 19–30 years) have started distancing themselves from Russia and consider themselves more Estonian. Simultaneously, many are caught between Estonia, Ukraine, and Russia and cannot take a clear stand. Although they do not trust Russia’s explanation of the war in Ukraine, they still hesitate in taking an unconditionally critical stance towards Russia. This study shows that most Russian speakers in Narva have a sense of membership with Estonia, which has not changed after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Additionally, for some young Russian speakers, an Estonian national identity was consolidated, possibly because of their perception of being Estonian citizens. This may affect their relations with Estonian society in the long term.

Background

Concept of ‘Russian speakers’

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, approximately 25 million ethnic Russians found themselves in the newly independent states that formerly constituted the Soviet Union (Laitin 1998). Owing to the complexities of their conditions, scholars refer to them as Russian speakers, Estonian-Russians, and Russophones. However, the reality is not as simple as the categories mentioned above, because different ethnic groups, such as Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Armenians speak Russian as a common language, as do those who have mixed with other

ethnic groups. A comparative study of Russian speakers in post-Soviet countries found no common sense of a ‘Russian diaspora’ or ‘Russian compatriots’ (Kosmarskaya 2005). Studies have also demonstrated that the complexity of the Russian-speaking world cannot be reduced to territorial, linguistic, or ethnic terms (Platt 2019).

Despite these points indicating the need to reconsider the categorisation of ‘Russian speakers’, the classification has been maintained since the idea of Russian-speaking people as a group emerged during the 1990s in the Baltic States. Various ethnic groups, whose self-identification shifted from an ethnic-based identity to a Russian-based one, speak Russian as their primary language (Laitin 1998). In the context of the Baltic States, linguistic identification has been used to link various Russian-speaking groups under a shared discourse of language discrimination, because the states have introduced strict language laws (Cheskin 2016). Moreover, the Kremlin has implemented a policy called ‘Russian compatriots’ for Russians living abroad (Kosmarskaya 2011). Although Russian speakers in Estonia likely view Russian culture as not necessarily connected to the self-proclaimed core representative of the Russian state (Jašina-Schäfer 2021), some observe that they are attracted by Russian high culture (Cheskin 2015; Kallas 2016). This creates a discursive basis for ‘Russian compatriots’ among the public and influences internal political decisions concerning Russian speakers.

Therefore, this article uses the term ‘Russian speaker’, considering Russia’s influence and features of the regional identities of Russian-speaking populations in the Baltic States. It does not aim to lump ‘Russian speakers’ into one group. Acknowledging the complexity of Russian speakers’ circumstances, this study intends to describe their sensibilities by focusing on individual narratives.

Narva

Narva, Estonia, has a unique socio-linguistic context. It is the largest town in Ida-Viru county (Ida-Virumaa), the most north-eastern part of Estonia, where Russian speakers make up approximately 74 per cent of the population². Narva shares its borders with Ivangorod, a Russian town³. Formerly prosperous city at the crossroads of different cultures and great powers, Narva was destroyed by fierce fighting between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union during the Second World War. Previous inhabitants were evacuated from the city and replaced primarily by working-class people from other Soviet Republics. Therefore, Narva’s population comprises approximately 96 per cent Russian speakers; people rarely encounter Estonians or speak Estonian in

daily life.

Language and ethnic composition are not the only factors that differentiate Narva. The city was reconstructed and underwent industrial development in the Soviet era. However, like many other post-Soviet industrial regions, it experienced an economic downturn in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as industries struggled with the privatisation of the market economy. Unemployment rose and Narva’s social and economic situation lagged. Some scholars consider Narva’s situation in relation to Estonia an internal peripheralisation (Pfoser 2018). Various redevelopment attempts have been made since.

Analytical framework

The ‘triadic-nexus’ framework

In the study of ethnic relations, Rogers Brubaker suggested a ‘triadic-nexus’ framework to comprehensively grasp the relationship between ‘national minority’, ‘nationalising state’, and ‘external national homeland’ (Brubaker 1995, 1996). David Smith (2002) later pointed out that one more conceptual actor should be considered as the fourth element: international organisations such as the European Union (EU).

Several scholars have adopted these nexus models to study Russian minorities in the Baltic States (e.g. Budryte 2005; Cheskin 2016; Galbreath 2005; Kallas 2016; Kelley 2004; Schulz 2018). In addition, recent studies have further segmented the categories of analysis and proposed a more detailed approach to the study of Russian speakers in different countries (Cheskin 2016; Pettai 2006; Rees and Burkhanov 2018). Used by several scholars in ethnic minority studies almost to the point of cliché (Pettai 2006, 125), the ‘triadic-nexus’ or ‘quadratic-nexus’ approach is effective in analysing the complicated situations of ethnic minorities. Recent studies suggest reconsidering the way Russophone communities are represented as complex phenomena consisting of various narratives and practices (Jašina-Schäfer 2021; Makarychev and Sazonov 2019).

‘Holders of common cultural codes’ as a new element

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has created a situation that requires reconsideration of the ‘quadratic nexus’ from another perspective. To analyse the possible influence of this event on Russian speakers in Estonia, understanding how they perceive the world during rapid social change is necessary. This study, therefore, introduces ‘holders of a common cultural code’ as a new concept. ‘Cultural codes’ are symbols and systems of meaning with specific relevance to members of a particular group or society (Hyatt and Simons 1999, 24). Codes are a ‘secret’

system of words, symbols, or behaviours used to convey contextually bound messages (*ibid.* 28). In other words, ‘cultural codes’ can be used to facilitate communication within the ‘inside group’ and obscure communication to ‘outside groups’ (*ibid.* 23). Therefore, the interrelationship between the levels and consequently, the understanding of culture, is often expressed through codes.

Based on the cultural codes argument, this study introduces the above-mentioned experimental concept. ‘Holders of common cultural codes’ and its surrounding situation potentially affect other holders of common cultural codes in different places (in this context, Russian speakers in Estonia) and other actors in the quadratic nexus. In this sense, this concept differs from that of other actors in the nexus and should be considered a variation. However, this does not mean that all actors consider Russians in former Soviet countries, including Russia, as their ‘compatriots’.

Three processes of identity construction

A conceptual tool to better grasp the reactions of Russian speakers during a time of drastic worldwide social change is required. At the micro-level, we assume some Russian speakers are aware that they might be viewed by Estonians in Estonian society within the framework of the ‘triadic nexus’ or based on their relations to Russia and Estonia, especially after 24 February 2022.

This study relies on a constructionist approach to ethnic and racial identity-making (Cornell and Hartmann [1998] 2007). Cornell and Hartmann’s approach assumes that an actor’s identity is (re)constructed through the following process. The actor first encounters changes in the surrounding environment; then, they interpret these changes, and finally, respond in various ways. On the perception level, ‘holders of common cultural codes’ play an important role. Regardless of whether Russian speakers perceive Russia as their external homeland or not, some Estonians see them as a group of people with connections to Russia. This is a perceived social pressure or labelling constructed on the notion of ‘holders of common cultural codes’.

Using this approach, this research explores how Russian speakers have reacted to the radical social changes caused by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and how it affects their identity construction/reconstruction. Notably, this study does not discuss the existence of such narratives in Estonian society; rather, it focuses on the perceptions of Russian speakers in Narva.

Methodology

Interviews

Interviews⁴ were conducted with 11 individuals originally from

Narva, Estonia. They were all Russian speakers whose native language is Russian and who have a Russian ethnic background. All interviewees were originally from Narva and lived in Estonia as officially registered residents; however, their citizenship statuses differed: Estonian citizenship, Russian citizenship, and the so-called grey passport or non-citizenship. Interviewees included university students, teachers, office workers, factory workers, construction workers, and public sector workers. They included six women and five men ranging from teenagers (≤ 19 years old) to older adults (aged up to their 60s). Some were first-generation immigrants who came to Estonia during the Soviet era, whereas others were second-generation immigrants born in Soviet Estonia (before 1991) or independent Estonia (after 1991). Two were born and educated in Narva until they started attending universities in Tallinn and Tartu. Interviewees were initially recruited using snowball sampling. The interviews were conducted from 24 February to 9 May 2022 in either Russian or English, depending on the interviewee’s preferences. They lasted between one and four hours, and were conducted in cafés, a college, their workplaces, or their homes. The original interviews included questions regarding their lives in Estonia and their relations with Estonian society, including their interpersonal contact with Estonians and Russian speakers. We then asked them about their experiences following the Ukrainian events on 24 February, how it affected their lives, and how they reacted to such changes. Considering the topic’s sensitivity and psychological impact, the interviews were conducted with particular care and attention. All informants’ names have been changed in this article to avoid possible identification.

This study aims to describe the complicated reality and delicate changes in people’s identities by focusing on a universe comprising a few Russian speakers, rather than presenting the general reactions of Russian-speaking communities in Estonia. In doing so, it presents a phenomenon that may hold true in broader contexts. Because respondents were recruited through snowball sampling, and first-contact participants were from a local university, there is a possibility of uneven distribution of informants’ social orientation.

Exploring the ‘quadratic nexus’ during Russia’s invasion of Ukraine

Before exploring how social changes in Estonia potentially affected Russian speakers in Narva, this section provides a broader picture. According to the ‘quadratic-nexus’ framework, it is important to consider the relationship between ethnic minorities, nationalising states (their resident states), kin-states, and

international organisations that exercise their influence on minority issues. In this nexus, each actor influences others. In this section, to establish a background, we provide an overview of the main reactions of Estonia, Russia, and the international community, such as the EU and NATO, to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Nationalising state: Estonia

Estonia is probably one of Ukraine's strongest supporters globally. Estonia's humanitarian⁵ and military assistance to Ukraine amounted to approximately 0.8 per cent of its GDP by the end of May 2022, by far the largest in the world⁶. Additionally, Estonia has accepted more than 40,000 refugees from Ukraine since the outbreak of the war, approximately 3 per cent of its population⁷. At the societal level, Estonia has expressed strong support and solidarity from the early stages, as evidenced by public events such as gatherings⁸, social media, displaying Ukrainian flags around cities⁹, and individuals wearing Ukrainian ribbons on their chests.

By contrast, Estonia's response to Russia was severe. The Estonian government closed Russia's consulate generals in Tartu and Narva¹⁰, introduced restrictions on the employment and business activities of Russian and Belarusian citizens¹¹, and halted the application of Russian and Belarusian citizens to major Estonian universities¹². At the societal level, there was a call by the Estonian gun owners' association (Eesti Relvaomanike Liit) to ban gun ownership among Russian and Belarusian citizens in Estonia; however, the Estonian Ministry of Interior officially rejected this¹³. Though this case was radical, these harsh reactions from Estonia are not surprising, considering the nation's long history of occupation by the Soviet Union as well as security concerns.

External homeland: Russia

The Kremlin has been seeking to influence Russian-speaking populations abroad by categorising them as 'compatriots', who encompass ethnic, cultural, linguistic, political, and even spiritual connotations through long-standing compatriot policies (Grigas 2016, 56, 78-82). The Kremlin proclaimed that one reason for Russia's invasion of Ukraine was to protect ethnic Russians and the Russian-speaking populations of Ukraine¹⁴; the Russian invasions of Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 were conducted under the same rationale. This narrative is Kremlin propaganda; however, some Russian-speaking populations reportedly believe it¹⁵.

During the 1990s, President Yel'tsin attempted to promote a Russian civic identity, asserting that Soviet successor states were

best positioned to look after their resident Russian-speaking populations. Although his initiative was not accompanied by a more assertive policy, its policies and discourse have become bound to civic and institutional parameters, and compatriots have been implicitly conceptualised in ethnic terms during Putin's presidencies (Laruelle 2015, 14). Russia's compatriot policies aim to strengthen cultural, historical, religious, and ethnic ties between 'Russian compatriots' and Russia. By doing so, the Kremlin has tried to create a 'spiritual connection' to Russia (Grigas 2016, 89). This explains Kremlin's understanding of its borders, and the motivation to expand the institutional, abstract, and territorial space over which Russia can claim some form of moral, spiritual, and institutional jurisdiction (Cheskin and Kachuyevski 2019, 8). Although Russia's efforts have been counterproductive in the former Soviet Republics (Rotaru 2018), its influence should be taken seriously.

International society (the EU and NATO)

The EU's reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine is similar to Estonia's, but weaker. An overview of the EU's primary reactions shows that soon after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the EU reacted with a series of sanctions and accusations against Russia¹⁶. The EU has also provided support, such as receiving Ukrainian refugees, humanitarian aid measures for Ukraine through the temporary protection mechanism, and financial support for the capabilities and resilience of Ukrainian armed forces through its civil protection mechanism¹⁷. However, despite its financial, humanitarian, and partial military support; sanctions against Russia; and reception of millions of displaced Ukrainians, there is no 'fast-track' feasible for Ukraine's EU accession at this time¹⁸.

Since the EU's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine is mostly at the inter-state level, it does not seem to have significantly affected Russian speakers in Estonia or other regions in this context, except in Ukraine. Concerning NATO's reaction, the largest change was that Finland and Sweden submitted official applications for NATO membership in May¹⁹.

Russian speakers' perception of 'holders of common cultural codes'

To examine the validity of the concept of 'holders of common cultural codes', in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we examine how Russian speakers in Estonia perceive people in Ukraine during the war.

We assume that the older generation who experienced the Soviet system tend to consider Ukrainians or Russians in Ukraine as having shared the same Soviet life experience. Boris is a construction worker who describes people in Ukraine as having

close cultural and linguistic connections with him.

We lived peacefully with Ukrainians and other ethnic groups during the Soviet era. There were many people from Ukraine in Narva, and we used to play together. We are good friends. [...] Actually, my relative’s son married a Ukrainian girl and lives there now. There are many Russians in Ukraine; Ukrainians speak Russian, and many Russians marry Ukrainians, so it is complicated. Ukrainians are like brothers who share the same values and culture. So, everyone is concerned, and it is a very difficult time for us. (Boris, 50s, male, construction worker).

The ‘brotherly (bratskii)’ notion increases the sense of connection with Ukrainians or Russians in Ukraine, and respondents usually spoke positively about them with memories of interaction. This is a typical example of the ‘brotherly narrative’ in Russian public discourse, in which Ukraine is portrayed as a brother nation with a shared ethnocultural and religious background (A’Beckatt 2012). Although Ukrainians have been described as ‘others’ in Russian public discourse after Euromaidan (Khaldarova 2019), the ‘brotherly narrative’ still functions in connection with Boris’ personal experience.

The younger generation’s perceptions differ from the ‘brother narrative’ of the older generation, which is well represented in Ekaterina’s case. Currently studying at a university in Tallinn, she often returns to Narva to visit her parents and friends. She regularly interacted with Ukrainians at her home university and spoke of them based on her observations:

I have some Ukrainian friends in Tallinn, and we have taken the same course. In my opinion, Ukrainians, Russians in Russia, and Russians in Estonia are all different, as each of us lives in a different country. But we speak the same language because they (Ukrainians) also speak Russian. They use slang or expressions that we do not use in Estonia, but they are basically the same. In addition, we share the same values. For example, classical literature is still important for culture. [...] I do not think Russia will come here, but of course, I am worried about it. (Ekaterina, 20s, female, student).

In her discourse, she draws a boundary between ‘holders of common cultural codes’ and others. As she states, this perceptual category is constructed from closely intertwined cultural, historical, linguistic, and historical aspects.

Therefore, although this was a subjective perception and the

extent to which this link is felt depends on the individual and generation, we infer from the discourse of Russian speakers in Estonia that many still tend to perceive Ukrainians in Ukraine and Russians in Russia as groups with cultural, linguistic, and value-based links.

Findings

This section discusses the influence of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on the Russian speakers in Narva. The analysis of this study shows that many Russian speakers in Narva have a sense of membership with Estonia, which has remained unchanged in Russia’s war. Furthermore, the self-identification as Estonians of some young Russian speakers, although not all, has been consolidated. This section describes the mechanism of change in Russian speakers’ self-identification.

Factor one: Reactions to refugees from Ukraine

This section analyses Russian speakers’ reactions to the visible changes associated with the Ukrainian war in their daily lives, such as the acceptance of Ukrainian refugees. As observed, Estonia started accepting many refugees from Ukraine just after Russia’s invasion of the country²⁰, equivalent to about 3 per cent of Estonia’s population by May 2022. How have such radical social changes affected Russian speakers in Narva?

Olga, aged in her 30s, was an office worker. Her legal status is ‘stateless’ since she could not study the Estonian language during the 1990s and lost her motivation to do so. This does not mean she was completely isolated from Estonian society; for example, she had frequent interactions with Estonians when she lived in Tallinn. She acknowledges the non-credibility of the Russian media.

I know that the Russian media is propaganda. I have some acquaintances in Ukraine, so I know there are no ‘fascists’ there. There are also many Russians in Ukraine. They (Ukrainians and Russians in Ukraine) speak Russian and have the same culture as I do. [...] Now, we have many Ukrainians who fled the war, and Estonian people are so kind to them. Personally, I feel sympathy for them, especially for the many children. This was a tragedy for everyone. But honestly, this is complicated. Why did Estonians not pay enough attention to us during the most difficult times? Will they (Ukrainians) obtain better jobs than us in the future? So, this should also be valued. (Olga, 30s, female, office worker).

Olga’s reaction to refugees from Ukraine indicates that she

compares the current social changes in Estonian society with her experience of the difficult times Russian speakers faced after 1991. She felt sympathy for the refugees. However, her dissatisfaction with Estonian society arose as a counter-reaction to this event. As she noted, the collective memory of Russian speakers serves as a reference point, and the different social attitudes between her generation and previous Ukrainians become a source of complaint. This reference point connects her experiences and makes it possible to interpret the world according to familiar or stereotypical stories. Olga connects the current trend of strong solidarity with Ukrainians and their past experiences and interprets it according to the story of inequality she has formulated.

However, some expressed solid support for Ukrainian refugees. Alex, who was born and grew up in the same city, works as a teacher in Narva. Unlike Olga, he clearly separated his feelings about the difficult conditions for Narva residents during the 1990s from his attitude towards Ukrainian refugees today.

Of course, I support Ukrainian refugees. They are mainly children and women, so I feel sympathy for them as a teacher. Many of them go to other European countries and do not stay here, but they still need help. This is just humanitarian aid. [...] We experienced a very difficult time and the Estonian state did not offer us enough support and care. We remember this, but it is a different story. I am an Estonian citizen, but my relatives are from both Ukraine and Russia. Therefore, I feel like my heart is divided. But it is our responsibility to show our support for them in whatever form. (Alex, 40s, male, teacher).

Both Olga and Alex remembered the difficult times faced by Russian speakers in the 1990s based on their own experiences; however, their reactions differed. While one was concerned about the potential competition with Ukrainians in Estonian society and the job market, the other expressed his support without any concerns. What, then, is an important element in determining these differences? Based on the discourse, a decisive factor in determining these differences is Estonian identity and a sense of belonging to society.

Another partly convincing explanation is group position theory or group threat theory. According to these theories, conflicts or competition based on ethnicity arise from one group's concern that its superiority is threatened by other groups. The more a person feels that their ethnic group is being treated unequally, the greater the tendency to feel stronger competitiveness with other groups (Bobo and Hutchings 1996). Additionally, such

people tend to have a negative perception of accepting immigrants (Hutchings and Wong 2014). This is applicable to Olga, but not to Alex. This difference could be attributed to their socio-economic status: the stability of employment changes one's perception of being threatened. This point is worth exploring in future studies.

Factor two: Unintended effects of banal nationalism

This section examines Russian speakers' reactions to other visible social changes. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, major Estonian cities installed numerous Ukrainian flags on buildings, streets, and other public spaces, and ordinary citizens began wearing Ukrainian ribbons on their chests to show solidarity and support. With Russian media describing Ukrainian authority as 'fascist', which is part of its disinformation campaign, and some Russian speakers believing this, such visible changes in the public space might elicit some reaction from Russian speakers in Estonia.

Andrey is a Russian citizen born and raised in Estonia. He says he studied Estonian but could not master it, so he chose Russian citizenship. He also claimed to have acknowledged the nature of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which is Russia's war. However, his story reveals that visible social changes in Estonian society have caused emotional contradictions.

The Russian Consulate is closed now, so I had to go to Tallinn to prolong my residence permit. I was so surprised to see Ukrainian flags everywhere! The Estonians wore Ukrainian ribbons. They (Ukrainian ribbons) were even on tables at the cafés. When I saw those many flags in Tallinn, it was a strange feeling. This does not mean I do not like Ukrainians, but I just cannot stand for one side. I am a Russian citizen, and my relatives live there, but I was born here and like Estonia. This is my homeland. I know this is Putin's war, but here, people also criticise Russians. So, it is very difficult for us. [...] I am between these countries. Not a full member of Estonia, and not of Russia. (Andrey, 40s, male, plant worker).

Ukrainian flags or ribbons are symbols expressing public support and solidarity for Ukraine and its people; however, Andrey perceived these flags not only as a symbol of support for Ukraine, but also of criticism of Russia or Russian citizens, which evoked complicated feelings. This scene was particularly visible to Russian speakers like Andrey coming from Narva, where few Ukrainian flags were installed in public spaces, causing a feeling of strangeness. However, different groups of Russian speakers experienced different emotions. Ekaterina expressed her

perceptions.

I support Ukrainians because this is just a normal reaction. I am a Russian speaker, but an Estonian citizen. I was born here, studied here, and lived here. I do not have any connections with Russia. [...] Currently, I live in Tallinn, so I have grown accustomed to seeing it (Ukrainian flags and ribbons). I have not paid particular attention to this, but it reminds me of the feeling of being against the war in Ukraine, Russia’s attack, and Russian politics. So, as I said, I do not have any connection with Russia, but these flags or ribbons strengthen my feeling of support for Ukrainians and my very negative image towards Russia. [...] It is a natural feeling for me because I am an Estonian citizen and have no links with Russia. As you can see, I am critical of them (Russia). (Ekaterina, 20s, female, student).

Ekaterina’s story shows that Ukrainian flags or ribbons, which she repeatedly encountered in daily life, unconsciously distanced her from Russia. The classic theory of ‘banal nationalism’ focuses on the everyday, less visible form of practice and explains how assumptions of nationhood are regularly conveyed through these small familiar turns of phrases (Billing 1995). This theory explains how these small reminders operate subconsciously, such as a flag hanging unnoticed outside public buildings. Therefore, the banal also subconsciously categorises people into ‘us’ and ‘them’. In addition to the possible effect of banal nationalism, her self-identification as an Estonian citizen seems to be an important element that changed her attitude towards Russia/Ukraine.

In Estonia’s case, Ukrainian flags are neither a symbol of Estonian nor Ukrainian nationalism, but a symbol of support and solidarity for Ukraine and an anti-Russian sentiment. Although the Estonian state and citizens consciously installed them in public, this gradually blended into the scene of everyday life and the public unconsciously internalised these sentiments. Considering Andrey and Ekaterina’s cases, no change in Andrey’s attitude towards Ukrainians could be observed, whereas in Ekaterina’s case, there was an increase in sympathy or support towards Ukrainians and disappointment with Russia. This comparison implies that the sense of being Estonian plays an important role in dividing Andrey and Ekaterina’s reactions. Importantly, like Andrey, some people have not experienced changes in their self-identification; therefore, the scope of an application based on banal nationalism is limited.

Factor three: Reactions to invisible societal changes

This section analyses the reaction of Russian speakers to invisible social changes in Estonia, ranging from drastic changes in the social atmosphere to various forms of sanctions against Russia. Although not targeted at Russian speakers in Estonia, these measures have indirectly affected some Russian speakers in Narva (especially those with relatives in Russia). How then have Russian speakers reacted to these changes?

Natalia, aged in her 20s, is a university student who just started studying in Tartu. She previously studied at an Estonian primary school in Narva and speaks fluent Estonian. This language skill enabled her to enrol in a faculty where all courses were taught in Estonian. She is one of those whose identity seems to have started shifting following Russia’s aggression.

I know that many people have a stereotype that all Russians (here, Russian speakers) in Narva support Putin and that we (Narvans) want to be part of Russia. [...] I thought that I have a strong Russian identity, but after the war began, I started distancing myself from Russia. Honestly, I was afraid of going to class after this incident (Russia’s invasion of Ukraine) because I thought no one would speak to me in class and would avoid me because I am Russian. Fortunately, this did not occur. At least Estonians think of me as an Estonian citizen who speaks Russian. [...] I consider myself an Estonian citizen, but now I feel it more strongly than before. This is simply because Russia’s attack is shocking and barbaric, and I recognise that we are very different from them (Russia). I do not want to be seen as Russian by Estonians, especially now. When I talk to Estonians, I say I am Russian because it is strange to say I am Estonian to Estonians. But when I talk to you, I say I am Estonian or an Estonian who speaks Russian [the interviewer is Japanese]. Estonians respect people who speak Estonian. (Natalia, 20s, female, university student)

Her story highlights two important points. First, she acknowledges the existing narrative of Narva’s Russian speakers’ stereotypical connection to Russia. The combination of Russia’s war and this understanding increased her concerns about being negatively labelled. Second, her Russian identity played a large part in her identification before the war; however, since its commencement, she has grown apart from Russia due to the invasion’s brutality and extremely negative impact. She also seems to have started developing more of an Estonian national identity than before.

Interestingly, like some of the other interviewees from the

younger generation who have daily interactions with Estonians, she came to identify more (or slightly) strongly with Estonia after the war. Her response indicates that the social environment in which she communicated daily with the Estonians and her anxiety about being perceived as related to Russia affected her identity. However, this study could not confirm whether the development of her national identity as Estonian is a direct consequence of her strategic attempt to cope with the social changes in Estonia following Russia's war.

Other interviewees responded differently from Natalia. Victory Day on 9 May — a commemorative day for Russian speakers to remember the victims of the Second World War in the post-Soviet space — is a good occasion to observe other types of reactions. However, it has long been a controversial topic in Central and Eastern European countries because the end of World War II meant the beginning of another occupation by the Soviet Union. In the Estonian context, there was a large dispute and violence on the part of some Russian-speaking populations over the 2007 relocation of the monument commemorating the war, followed by a massive cyberattack on Estonian governmental institutions. This event severely divided Estonian society (Brüggemann and Kasekamp 2008; Ehala 2009). Russia's involvement in the event was deeply suspected (Crandall 2014, 36), increasing Estonia's security concerns.

Similarly, and considering Russia's aggression in Ukraine, the Estonian government decided to prohibit public parades or meetings, as well as symbols showing support for the Russian army on 9 May 2022; the day passed without significant problems. Were there any reactions from the Russian speakers who participated in this event?

Anton, in his 60s, is a retired pensioner. He was a factory worker in Narva and became a pensioner a few years ago. On Victory Day, he paid his respects and offered flowers at a tank monument located in a peaceful suburb of Narva. He celebrates the day with his old friends every year.

Victory Day is a memorial for us to commemorate the victims of World War II and their relatives. Thus, it has no relationship to the current war in Ukraine. But Estonians say we support the Russian war or we want Putin here. I think the US is behind the war, but I hope for peace in Ukraine and everywhere. Russians are peaceful people. [...] I know that Russians and Estonians have different histories. But I was born in Estonia, worked for Estonia's development, and lived in Estonia. We do not have any problems with the Estonians. Indeed, I do not speak Estonian well, but it does not mean I do not respect them. I learnt Estonian for one-and-a-half years in the 1990s, but I just could not master it. Nevertheless, every time I go to Tallinn, I try to speak in Estonian. [...] Why are there so many police? There was no police presence on Estonian independence day (24 February). This shows prejudice towards us. We are not troublemakers. For this reason, we do not feel fully accepted by Estonia. (Anton, 60s, male, factory worker)

As seen in Anton's case, his perception of being viewed or treated as having a potential relationship with Russia because of the change in public attitude caused a reaction against Estonian society and a feeling of social exclusion. The Estonian government and politicians have been working to explain current events to

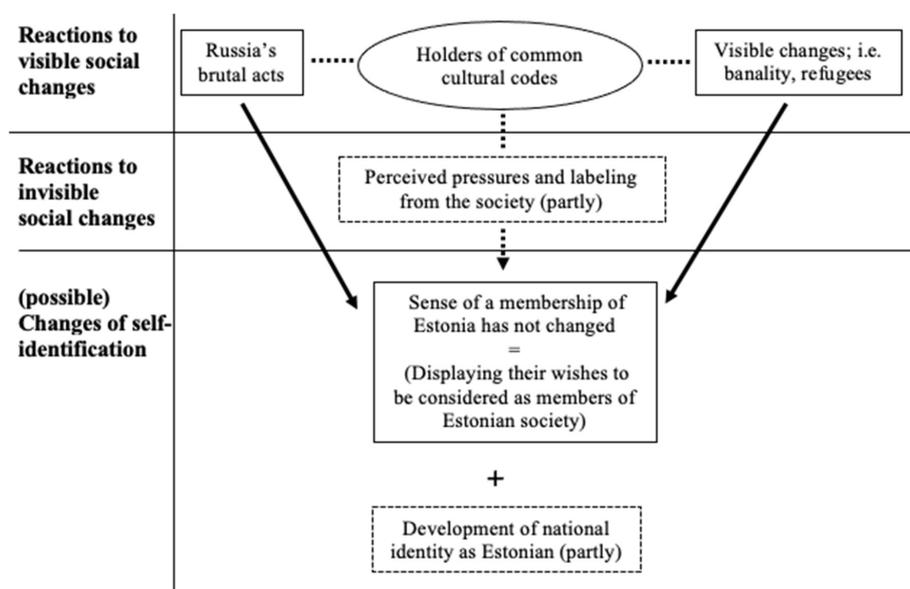


Figure 1: Mechanism of changing self-identification (author)

eliminate anxiety after the incident and make them feel part of Estonian society²¹. Despite such efforts, in his case, among others, the enhanced security on 9 May and excessive attention from society or the media caused frustration in Estonian society. Anton’s distress underlies his expression of his sense of membership of Estonian society and his claim to want to be considered as one, not a ‘non-member’, of the society.

Notably, most of the older generation experienced economically and socially difficult times (after 1991), and many believe the Estonian government, and partly the society as a whole, did not pay enough attention to Narva. They believe a stereotypical perception leading to looking down at Narvans remains. The development of this perception of being negatively labelled by Estonian society is assumed to be based on their awareness.

Conclusion

This study analyses the influence of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine on Russian speakers living in Estonia to better understand their reaction to the significant social change caused by Russia’s aggression. It focuses on the micro-level changes surrounding Russian speakers in Narva by employing Cornell and Hartmann’s constructionist approach to ethnic identity and integrating the new concept of ‘holders of common cultural codes’. Based on the interview data collected by the author, this study presents a hypothesis of the model, which explains the mechanism of the change of self-identification among Russian speakers (Figure 1).

First, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has had a serious psychological impact on Russian speakers. Estonian society reacted promptly to the event and showed solid support for Ukrainians while harshly condemning Russia. The atmosphere in Estonian society was severe because of Estonia’s history and geographical location. Estonia’s support included the acceptance of a large number of Ukrainian refugees and an expression of solidarity, such as the display of flags and ribbons. These visible social changes unconsciously influenced some Russian speakers in Estonia. However, the scope of an application based on banal nationalism is limited as it has been shown in this study.

Second, these social changes partially increased the perceived pressure and labelling of Russian speakers in Estonia. Despite such changes, many Russian speakers’ sense of membership of Estonia has not changed. They may not say it openly; however, they want to be considered members of Estonian society. Furthermore, some young Russian speakers consolidated their national identity as Estonians. However, which factors divided those who experienced an increase in Estonian self-

identification and those who did not? This study could not confirm whether the development of self-identification as Estonian was a direct consequence of their concerns over perceived labelling. However, self-identification as an Estonian seems to be an important factor, as all respondents who experienced this change claimed to have self-identified as Estonian citizens before 24 February 2022.

Third, many Russian speakers seem caught between Estonia, Russia, and even Ukraine. Although they did not show explicit support for the war and some even started distancing themselves from the country, their stance towards Russia remained ambiguous: They could not outright condemn Russia’s invasion and tried to cultivate a balanced view. As such, they are ‘caught between’ Estonia and Russia.

Notably, some informants received information through Russian-state media and other Russian media (e.g., NTB, RT, Yandex, novosti.mail.ru, Lenta and RBK) that originated from Russia²². Therefore, they may accept the Kremlin’s narrative regarding the war in Ukraine. This influence should be considered in other research. This study aimed to present the potential influence of the war in Ukraine on Russian speakers in Estonia. The results of this study are provisional, and further systematic research is required.

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Data availability statement

Owing to the nature of the research, the participants’ data—other than that already presented in the manuscript—are not publicly available due to privacy restrictions.

¹ Eesti Rahvusringhääling (ERR), Poll: Estonian support high for taking in Ukrainian refugees, accessed from: <https://news.err.ee/1608523322/poll-estonian-support-high-for-taking-in-ukrainian-refugees> (as of 20.03.2022). According to this article, 91 per cent of Estonians support accepting Ukrainian refugees if necessary, and 48 per cent of non-

Estonians support it. The data were collected between 25 February and 1 March 2022. These figures changed by the end of April: For the same question, 90 per cent of Estonians and 59 per cent of non-Estonians expressed support. Accessed from: <https://news.err.ee/1608585118/support-for-ukrainian-refugees-rises-among-non-estonians> (as of 03.05.2022).

² Data from 2021, accessed from Statistics Estonia (https://andmed.stat.ee/en/stat/rahvastik__rahvastikunaitajad-ja-koosseis__rahvaarv-ja-rahvastiku-koosseis/RV0222U).

³ The border is divided by a river (Narva jõgi). Therefore, Narva is not connected with Russia by land.

⁴ The interviewees provided oral informed consent to participate in the study. They were informed that participation is voluntary and their identity would remain confidential.

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, Humanitarian aid to Ukraine, accessed from: <https://vm.ee/en/humanitarian-aid-ukraine> (as of 15 May 2022).

⁶ Kiel Institute for the World Economy (2022), The Ukrainian Support Tracker: Which countries help Ukraine and how? (No. 2218), accessed from: https://www.ifw-kiel.de/fileadmin/Dateiverwaltung/IfW-Publications/-ifw/Kiel_Working_Paper/2022/KWP_2218_Which_countries_help_Ukraine_and_how_/KWP_2218_v2_052022.pdf, p.17-18.

⁷ Eesti Rahvusringhääling (ERR), <https://news.err.ee/1608606811/ppa-estonia-has-received-more-than-40-000-refugees-from-ukraine> (26.05.2022).

⁸ ERR, <https://news.err.ee/1608513395/gallery-thousands-gather-at-tallinn-protest-in-solidarity-with-ukraine> (26.02.2022).

⁹ ERR, <https://news.err.ee/1608519116/tartu-flies-ukrainian-flags-in-solidarity> (03.03.2022).

¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, Estonia expels 14 consular staff of Russia and closes Russia's consulate general in Narva and Tartu office, accessed from: <https://vm.ee/en/news/estonia-expels-14-consular-staff-russia-and-closes-russias-consulate-general-narva-and-tartu> (viewed 05.04.2022).

¹¹ Estonian Police and Border Guard Board, Restrictions on employment and business activities for Russians and Belarusian citizens, accessed from: <https://www.politsei.ee/en/news/restrictions-on-employment-and-business-activities-for-russian-and-belarusian-citizens-10460> (11.04.2022). This said, current valid residence permits and grounds for staying in Estonia of the citizens of these countries have not been revoked, and visa holders can apply for extensions as normal. It is also possible for them to travel to Estonia on family-related or humanitarian grounds.

¹² For example, ERR, Tartu University to restrict applications from Russian, Belarusian students, accessed from: <https://news.err.ee/1608525761/tartu-university-to-restrict-applications-from-russian-belarusian-students> (09.03.2022). / ERR, TalTech stops accepting new Russian, Belarusian students, accessed from: <https://news.err.ee/1608541129/taltech-stops-accepting-new-russian-belarusian-students> (23.03.2022). / Tallinn University, Tallinn University restricts admission of Russian and Belarusian students for the next academic year, accessed from: <https://www.tlu.ee/en/news/tallinn-university-restricts-admission-russian-and-belarusian-students-next-academic-year> (05.04.2022).

¹³ ERR, Ministry rejects call for firearms ownership ban on Russian citizens, accessed from: <https://news.err.ee/1608540217/ministry-rejects-call-for-firearms-ownership-ban-on-russian-citizens> (22.03.2022).

¹⁴ Putin, Vladimir, Kremlin, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/>

news/67843 (24.02.2022).

¹⁵ For example, BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61555691> (viewed 27.05.2022).

¹⁶ Council of the EU, RU response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, accessed from: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/timeline-eu-response-ukraine-invasion/> (viewed 11.05.2022). Also, European Commission, EU sanctions against Russia following the invasion of Ukraine, accessed from: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/eu-solidarity-ukraine/eu-sanctions-against-russia-following-invasion-ukraine_en (viewed 15.05.2022).

¹⁷ Council of the EU press release (23.03.2022), accessed from: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/23/eu-support-to-ukraine-council-doubles-funding-under-the-european-peace-facility/> (viewed 11.05.2022). Also, European Commission, EU assistance to Ukraine, accessed from: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/eu-solidarity-ukraine/eu-assistance-ukraine_en (viewed 15.05.2022).

¹⁸ The Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), (2022). *Opinion on Ukraine's Application for Membership of the European Union*, accessed from: <https://www.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/PI2022-16-Ukraines-EU-membership.pdf>.

¹⁹ NATO, *Finland and Sweden submit applications to join NATO*, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_195468.htm (viewed 18.05.2022).

²⁰ The graph provides more detail. ERR, *Number of Ukrainian refugees in Estonia passed 34,000*, <https://news.err.ee/1608582589/number-of-ukrainian-refugees-in-estonia-passes-34-000> (viewed 10.06.2022).

²¹ ERR, *President Alar Karis visits Narva*, <https://news.err.ee/1608589198/gallery-president-alar-karis-visits-narva-holds-town-hall-with-locals> (viewed 06/05.2022). / NPR, How one of Russia's neighbors is dealing with Putin's propaganda, <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/11/1096856581/how-one-of-russias-neighbors-is-dealing-with-putins-propaganda> (viewed 11.03.2022).

²² This was confirmed during the fieldwork conducted by the author. Although Russian state media has been blocked in Estonia after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, some local residents continue to receive information through personally installed receivers. Regarding the broader picture of the media and information consumption among Russian speakers in Estonia, the latest study based on 2020 data shows that Estonian news media provided in Russian (e.g. rus.delfi.ee and rus.err.ee) has become the main information source; they have begun considering local (Estonia's) Russian-language media as more trustworthy than Russian state media (Eesti ühiskonna integratsiooni monitoring EIM. 2020, https://www.praxis.ee/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Integratsiooni_Monitoring2020_loplik.pdf, viewed October 12, 2022). The same study reveals that people of other nationalities (mainly Russian speakers in this context) are less informed about Estonia than about Russia (the information levels about Estonia and Russia were almost the same in 2008). However, Russia's media remains an important, if not the primary information source for some Russian speakers. However, people from Ida-Viru County, where Narva is located, differ: they believe they are better informed about their home locality and Russia than about Estonia. A different study shows that 92% of Russian speakers in Estonia follow at least one media channel that originated in Russia, every day (Vihalemm, Juzefovičs and Leppik 2019). These studies were conducted before 2022, and therefore the situation would have changed now; however, they provide information on the extent to which Russian media was consumed by Russian speakers in Estonia.

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Resume

‘We belong to Estonia’: Influence of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on Russian speakers in Estonia

(「エストニアは私たちの居場所」—ロシアのウクライナ侵攻がエストニアのロシア語系住民へ及ぼす影響—)

福原 優策

2022年2月24日に始まったロシアによるウクライナ侵攻は、表向きにはウクライナ東部でウクライナの「ネオナチ」から迫害されているロシア語系住民を解放するという論理の下遂行されてきた。これはロシア当局がウクライナ侵攻を正当化するために使用してきた偽のナラティブであることは周知の事実であるが、多くの旧ソ連諸国には現在でも多数のロシア語系住民が居住している以上、これらの国々に居住するロシア語系住民が置かれた環境の複雑さや彼ら/彼女らの生活の実態について事実に基づき詳細に把握することは、当該諸国のみならず、世界的にも重要となっている。

その中でも本論文はエストニア第三の都市であるナルヴァという町のロシア語系住民に着目する。エストニアは旧ソ連に不法占領された歴史を有する国家であるが、その影響もあり、現在においても人口の約四分の一をロシア語話者が占めている。その上、ロシアと国境を接するエストニア北東部の町ナルヴァは人口の約96%がロシア語系住民であり、国籍という観点から見ても約三分の一の住民がロシア国籍保持者という特殊な言語・社会環境を有している。

一方で、エストニア社会全体で見れば、ソ連による占領の歴史や安全保障環境から、社会全体でウクライナへの連帯・支援を表明し、ロシアに対しては非常に強固な対応を行なっている。ナルヴァという地理的にも言語的にもロシアの影響を受けやすい特殊な環境で暮らしているロシア語系住民たちは、今次のロシアのウクライナ侵攻、そして、その対応としてのエストニア社会の急激な変化にどのように反応しているのか。

欧州・旧ソ連地域に居住する民族的マイノリティを対象とした研究では、ロジャーズ・ブルーベーカーの「三者関係」枠組が広く用いられてきた。これは民族的マイノリティを彼ら/彼女らが居住する本国、及び、彼ら/彼女ら

にとつての（潜在的な）外部の本国との関係で捉える視点である。更に、多くの研究者はこの枠組に欧州連合などの国際機関を加えることで、「三者関係」を「四者関係」に発展させた。これらの枠組はロシア周辺国に居住するロシア語系住民を対象とした研究においても多用されてきた。しかし、今次のロシアのウクライナ侵攻、それに起因する国際社会、及び、エストニア社会の急激な変化がロシア語系住民に及ぼした影響を分析するには、よりミクロな視点から状況を捉えるための新たな枠組が必要である。

本稿は「共通の文化的コードの所有者」という新たな概念を導入することで、ナルヴァのロシア語系住民が、エストニア国外のロシア語話者（例えば、ロシアのロシア人）を共通の言語・文化を共有する者として認識する場合があること、そして、エストニア社会からもそのような繋がりがあるという眼差しで見られることがあると認識していることを示す。

その上で、筆者がナルヴァで現地のロシア語系住民を対象に行なったインタビュー調査をもとに、上記のような認識を持つロシア語系住民がロシアのウクライナ侵攻やエストニア社会の変化に如何に反応したかを分析する。結果として、ナルヴァのロシア語系住民の多くはエストニア社会から社会の構成員として快く受け入れられていない場面もあるという認識を抱きつつも、自らをエストニアで人生の殆どを過ごし社会の発展に寄与してきたエストニア社会の一員として認識しており、それを周囲（エストニア社会）にも広く受け入れてほしいという感情を抱いている。そのエストニア社会の構成員としての意識は、ロシアのウクライナ侵攻後の社会的混乱の最中にも変化することはなかったことを明らかにする。

加えて、ロシア語系住民の中でも、依然としてロシアの戦争に関するナラティブに一定程度の共感を示し、エストニア社会の変化を反感を含む否定的な感情をもって反応し

た人々、または、ロシアから距離をとると共にエストニア人としての自己認識の高まりを経験した人々がいることを明らかにする。この二つのタイプの反応を分ける要因として、ロシアのウクライナ侵攻が起きる前の時点におけるエストニア人意識、もしくは、エストニア社会への所属意識

が一定の役割を果たしていると考えられることを提示する。本稿で提示される結果は、暫定的なものではあるが、ロシア語系住民のエストニア社会への統合とロシアとの関係に関する今後の議論に寄与しうる内容である。