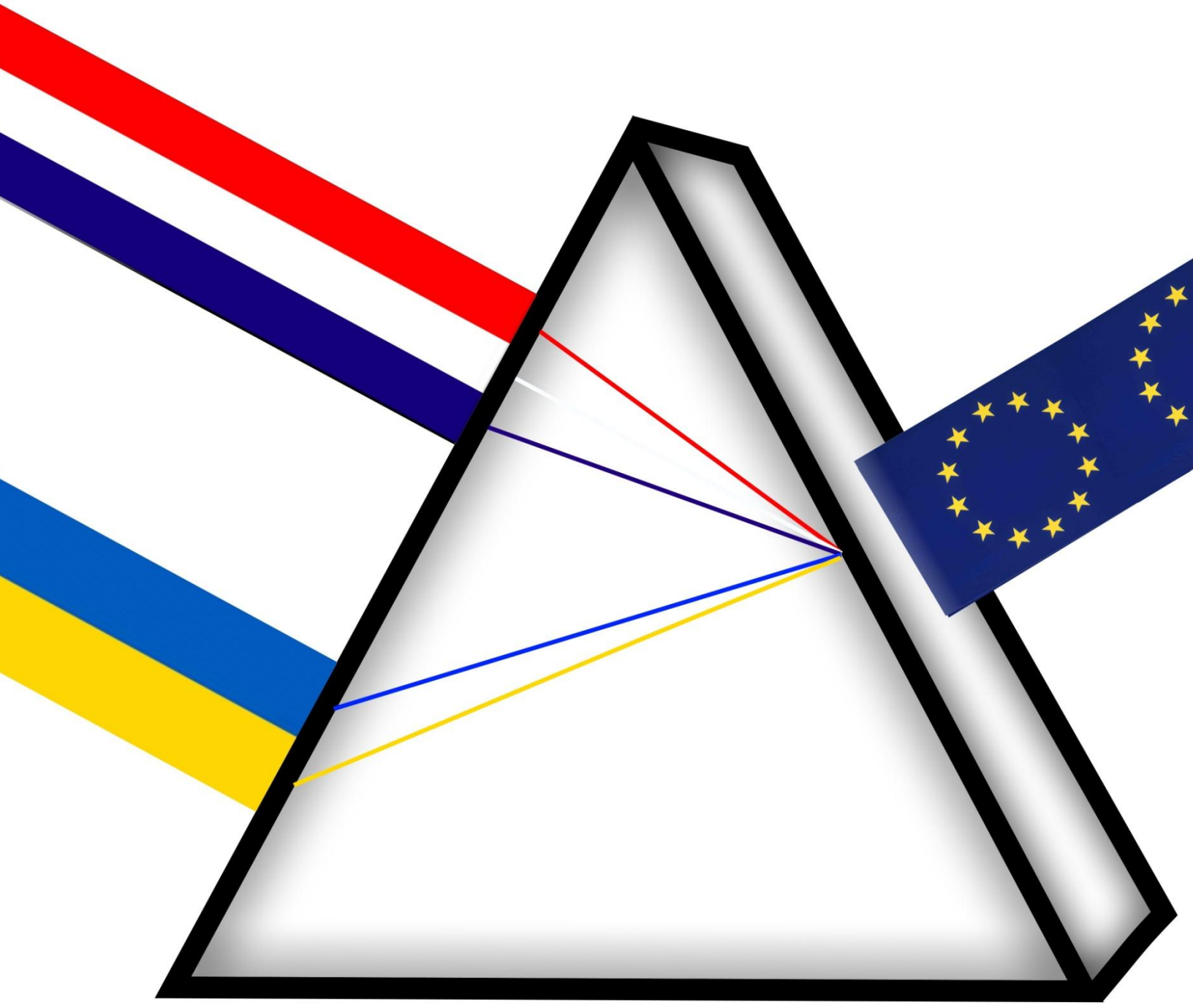
“It’s all about freedom, equality, and democracy”

The patterns in the (re)construction of a triangle of ‘imaginative geographies’ by Ukrainian diaspora activists in the Netherlands



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Abstract

European Union (EU) member state countries, including the Netherlands, (re)construct the meaning of Europe. Ukrainian diaspora activists in the Netherlands find themselves in a triangle of imaginative geographies of 'the Netherlands,' 'Ukraine,' and 'Europe,' because of the referendum on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. Diaspora uses civic participation (activities, demonstration, and representations) to express their imaginative geographies. To fathom the (re)construction of their imaginative geographies from below the research focuses on civic participation.

The research uses participant observation and semi-structured interviews with their visuals, to understand and explain the patterns in how they contest/negotiate/transform these imaginative geographies.

Ukrainian diaspora activists experience friction in their sense of belonging to the Netherlands despite opposite theoretical argumentation. Furthermore, the categorization of 'Russia' in the imaginative geography of 'Ukraine' is hidden from the public domain. And they detach the legal membership to the EU from the way they imagine Europe. In doing so, they imagine Ukraine to be part of Europe since Ukraine has the same foundational norms and values of among other freedom, equality, and democracy.

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1. Introduction

Several activities illustrate that the foundations of the European Union (EU) are under scrutiny in the public eye. In June 2016 the British people voted in favor to leave the EU with the Brexit referendum. In December that same year, Italians cast their votes in a referendum which could have had consequences for the EU. Even though it was not directly related to the Italian EU-membership, this referendum was framed in international media (e.g. The Guardian, BBC) as a moment of national discontentment or disapproval with the current national government. In case new elections had to be organized as a result of the referendum, it could have had consequences for the Italian EU-membership as it would have opened a door for the growing popularity of the Eurosceptics and populists such as the Five Star Movement. And with the Dutch politician Geert Wilders and other European politicians such as Marine Le Pen, Beppe Grillo, and Frauke Petry getting together at a European far-right leaders meeting in Koblenz, Germany on the 21st January 2017, Eurosceptic politicians are forming a front.

The questions which surround these two activities are: where are the borders of the EU and where should they be? These are spatial questions about Europe. It also dealt with the question of EU membership: who belongs to the EU? More fundamental questions were are at stake, such as: what are the norms and values; and which norms and values are in line with the contemporary EU? These questions are part of the European reconstruction discourse.

Another case which illustrates this reconstruction discourse is the referendum on the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement[1] (hereafter referred to as Association Agreement) in the Netherlands on April 6, 2016. The Association Agreement was signed and implemented on the first of January, 2016 whereby Ukraine joined the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with the European Union. The referendum in the Netherlands put the Dutch ratification of the Association Agreement to the vote.

It is an uncertain time for the European Union, as the United Kingdom leaves, while a non-member country (Ukraine) wishes to be associated. Despite that wish, another European country, the Netherlands is reevaluating its support for that association using a referendum.

1.2. Societal relevance

This research focuses on the perspective of diaspora activists in the socio-political (re)construction discourse on who belongs to the European Union; where the borders are of the European Union; and which norms and values are considered European as a whole. This bottom-up perspective is investigated at times of the referendum on the Association Agreement in the Netherlands.

The socio-political discourse is dominated by a top-down perspective of elites such as politicians and country leaders.

The diaspora's "from below" perspective made way for new ideas and thoughts about the (re)construction of the imaginative geographies at hand (Della Ports et al., 2006). By investigating this perspective on imaginative geographies, the Ukrainian diaspora was given a platform which was not common in the media in the leading up to the referendum. The relation between Europe and non-European diaspora living in Europe received little attention in the dominant media and socio-political

[1] Officially called the 'Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their member states, of the one part, and Ukraine, of the other part'.

discourse surrounding period the referendum. The newly gained insights in the (re)construction discourse were provided by looking at how the diaspora imagine the Netherlands, Europe while coming from their country of origin, Ukraine, a non-European country.

1.3.The referendum

Ukrainian diaspora activists became civically active in the months leading up to the referendum because 450.000 citizens signed a petition to a citizen initiative which needed 300.000 signatures.
The initiators of the petition called themselves 'GeenPeil,' whose slogan was "more participation/voice in a democracy of everyone[2]" (GeenPeil, 2015). Bart Nijman, the driving force behind GeenPeil, says that they organized the initiative because they want "to channel the discontentment in the [Dutch] society to deliver an alarm signal within the framework of the democracy[3]" (Heck, 2016). He argued that voters should have more influence in the European decision-making process, at the same time European political decisions should have less influence on the Dutch democracy. A couple of days before the referendum took place; Nijman twittered that he is hardly interested in Ukraine, or the agreement, instead the referendum is a "coat rack" for an increase in the democratization of Europe (Dongen, 2016).

In the period leading up to the referendum, there was a highly active counter group which focused on the promotion of voting 'pro' the Association Agreement. One of the organizations, 'Oekraïners in Nederland' ("Ukrainians in the Netherlands"), was on this side of the opinion spectrum. This foundation was one of the main Ukrainian diaspora organizations in the Netherlands. The foundation has among other long-term goals: "establish an active Ukrainian diaspora in the Netherlands; support of further development of the Ukrainian sovereignty; promotion of the positive image of Ukraine and Ukrainians in the Netherlands" (Oekraïners in Nederland, [2014]). Groups of Ukrainians who are involved in the diaspora foundation are located in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Groningen. Nevertheless, Ukrainian diaspora is spread throughout the Netherlands. Most of these Ukrainian activists in the Netherlands live for long periods (with an average of 10 years) in the Netherlands and have an official residential permit, or even a Dutch passport, speak the language (almost) fluently, live in Dutch neighborhoods, are married to Dutch citizens and so. The perspective of these Ukrainian activists is the focus of this research. More information about the sampling will follow in chapter four.
The Ukrainians activists in the Netherlands showed public involvement in exercising citizenship, which is called citizenship practice (Preston et al., 2006:1634). In the months leading up to the referendum, the foundations organized demonstrations in Amsterdam and spread flyers to promote the 'yes' votes. Furthermore, they organized Ukrainian culture parties, showed film and documentaries about Ukraine and EuroMaidan, and held a political panel debate in the months leading up to the referendum. The announcements of these activities and activities – and pictures of them taking place are found on the online foundations' websites and Facebook pages.

[2] Translation by author
[3] Translation by author

Despite Ukrainian diaspora activists efforts to have a majority of 'for' votes, Dutch people voted against the Association Agreement.

On the day of the referendum, 61 percent of the voters (equal to 2.509.395 voters of the approximately 12 million allegeable voters in the country) voted against the Association Agreement (Kiesraad, 2016). This result shows the legal c.q. conditional threshold of thirty percent was just passed with a 32,28 percent turnout (Kiesraad, 2016). The referendum had an advisory character, which meant that since the conditional threshold was met, the Dutch government had to reconsider the signing of the Agreement. It was an issue of reconsideration since both the chamber and Senate ('Eerste Kamer and Tweede Kamer') ratified the draft agreement and not an issue of signing or not.

In the referendum, Ukrainian diaspora activists in the Netherlands felt that they publically had to take part in this debate. They were "civically active" by vocalizing publically their opinions about socio-political, cultural and economic links between Ukraine and the Netherlands, and Ukraine and Europe (Preston et al., 2006). During demonstrations in the Netherlands and Brussels, European Union flags were waved by Ukrainian diaspora. The same has been seen at times of EuroMaidan[4] was the first nationwide protest where European flags were waved, and Ukrainians painted their faces blue with yellow stars.

These various links display the transnational links which are developed and maintained by Ukrainian diaspora activists in not only the Netherlands, but also in Ukraine (because they display the current situation in Ukraine), and in the European Union (Mitchell, 2000; Basch, Schiller & Blanc, 1994:4).

The referendum on the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement put the Ukrainian diaspora in a particular position, especially the Ukrainian diaspora activists. First of all, they found themselves in a situation where their country of residence (The Netherlands) questioned the Association Agreement with their country of origin (Ukraine).

Furthermore, the symbolic link of EuroMaidan-revolution between Ukraine and Europe, and the symbolic relevance of the revolution can be perceived as denied and not acknowledged by Dutch voters since the referendum resulted in a 'no' against the Association Agreement.

The socio-political context of the referendum sets a stage to talk about the 'direct objects': Ukraine, the Netherlands, and Europe. Because these three geographies were discussed in a socio-political discourse all were 'imaginative geographies'. Chapter two will discuss the theoretical debate and conceptualization of imaginative geographies.

1.4. The history and current situation of Ukraine

The active counter group of Ukrainian diaspora activists comes from a non-EU member state. It is relevant to have a better understanding of their country's background as it shaped and influenced the 'imaginative geographies' of Ukraine by Ukrainian diaspora activists.

Ukraine is a country with an eventful and complicated history. In-between both world wars Ukraine became shortly independent, but for most of the twentieth century, it was part of the Soviet Union. In

[4] The square where the movement of EuroMaidan was held is a centrally located square in Kiev: Maidan Nezalezhnosti, which translates as 'Independence Square'. For the duration of the movement that square was temporarily renamed to EuroMaidan. The *maidan* in EuroMaidan, traces back to the Ukrainian language and the geographical space of the movement.

1991, Ukraine declared itself a neutral, independent state. Several years after a turbulent period of a democratic revolution, called the Orange Revolution, which ended in 2005, former President Yanukovych started his presidency in 2010. He came to power till he declared that he wanted to suspend the Association Agreement and strengthen the economic relationship with Russia once again in 2013. From 21 November 2013 till February 2014 people engaged in demonstrations and protests. People refer to this period as the local euphemism, Revolution of Dignity, popular and internationally known as EuroMaidan. During the civil revolution, citizens demanded an increase of European integration by Ukraine, the stepping down of (former) President Yanukovych and early elections (Shevda & Park, 2015). An end came to the revolution the day the new parliamentarian president, and interim president Oleksandr Turchynov was appointed. Two days later an arrest warrant against the deposed president was promulgated, as he was accused of "mass murder of peaceful citizens." The reason why the warrant is drafted as following is that police, and a couple of military forces carried out multiple violent attacks on civilians and protesters during the revolution which resulted in at least 79 deaths, and 570 civilians were injured[5] (Gatehouse, 2015).

It needs to be noted that the EuroMaidan protest[6] was not only based in Kiev. Despite that the biggest, encompassing and most well-known protest was the one in Kiev, there were similar, but smaller protest ongoing at the same time in different cities, for example, L'viv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Rivne, Chernivtsi, Zhytomyr, and Cherkasy (Tyzhden, 2013). This shows that EuroMaidan was countrywide and not only locally based. The EuroMaidan-protests were organized by Ukrainian diaspora 'locally.' The Ukrainian diaspora in the Netherlands was active in this movement, as they held protests every weekend at the central located Dam Square in Amsterdam.

EuroMaidan started as a protest, but became a nationwide revolution, since there was a fundamental change in the country and social, political and economic reforms are still taking place.

The end of the EuroMaidan-protest was immediately followed by the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in February 2014, and the armed conflict in Donbass in eastern Ukraine in March 2014. The last two activities are still ongoing up till the moment of writing, March 2017. The last two

[5] Interestingly, Russia Today is one of the media with the highest reported number of Ukrainian deaths and injured people in the article "Ukraine's bloodshed: Kiev death toll". Retrieved on 24 May 2016 at https://www.rt.com/news/ukraine-kiev-death-toll-955/. Usually, Russian media reports a lower number of Ukrainian victims during EuroMaidan than other media e.g. BBC (article by Gatehouse) and Guardian.

[6] The context of Ukraine can be framed in different ways. This research frames EuroMaidan as a (civil) revolution. A popular euphemism under Ukrainians is "revolution of dignity," which indicates the significance of EuroMaidan. It started as a protest by students, who were joined by workers and middle class citizens from all over the country. The protest lasted for three months. A protest is framed as a manifestation in a real space with one collective objective. It did not stop there though, since there was a fundamental change in the country. After EuroMaidan, people demanded a different lifestyle. Which resulted in a change in political power and organizational structure. Up till this day reforms are taking place.

Also the framing of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine needs to be addressed. By some people the war is labeled as a civil war. However, International Criminal Court finds it just to label it a armed conflict (International Criminal Court, 2016:37). There is additional investigation needed into the situation whether or not it is an war between Ukraine and Russia, as ongoing shelling and detention of military personnel by both states "points to direct military engagement between Russian armed forces and Ukrainian government forces that would suggest the existence of an international armed conflict in the context of armed hostilities in eastern Ukraine from 14 July 2014 at the latest, in parallel to the non-international armed conflict (International Criminal Court, 2016:37)."

activities heated the relationship between Ukraine and the Russian Federation because Russia undermined the independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Next to that, EuroMaidan was a response to the presidential decision to grow stronger economic and political ties with the Russian Federation instead of the European Union. The revolution is therefore indirectly against Russia and pro-Europe.
During the protest, Ukrainians waved European flags and painted their faces blue with yellow stars to show their strong disagreement with the government decision not to sign the Association Agreement with the EU.

The negative outcome of the referendum and the long-established democracy in the Netherlands backfired on the Association Agreement which was supposed to support and promote European norms and values, among others democracy in Ukraine. Furthermore, citizens of the society wherein members of the Ukrainian diaspora live voted against the Association Agreement. Also, Dutch citizens disapproved of the political systems – namely democracy and the EU - and human rights which were both symbolic motivations and goals for the Ukrainian people to start EuroMaidan and even fight and die for these principles and rights to become established and respected in Ukraine.
From this social-political context, a triangle of, what Said (1978) called, imaginative geographies is observable wherein Ukrainian activists in the Netherlands had to uphold themselves. The activists operated between three geographies: The Netherlands, Ukraine, and Europe.

1.5. Structure of thesis

This thesis is structured as following: hereafter, the theoretical framework and conceptualization will discuss transnationalism, imaginative geographies, and civic participation. Followed by the research objective and main research questions, the sub-questions, and the scientific relevance are provided. The next chapter contains a discussion of the used methodologies which are used during the field research leading up to this thesis. It will continue with three empirical chapters for each imaginative geography: The fifth chapter discusses the Netherlands; Chapter six is about Ukraine and Europe is discussed in chapter seven. The last chapter of this thesis sums it up and concludes it by saying that the (re)construction patterns of the three imaginative geographies come down to mentalities which correspond with sets of norms and values, such as freedom, equality, and democracy.

2. Theoretical framework & conceptual discussion

2.1. Transnationalism

Globalization created an interconnected world and enhanced the mobility of people. People brought to other places, and countries remained to have, for example, social, cultural and communicative links to their countries of origin. This is a non-specific description of transnationalism as "multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states" (Vertovec, 1999:447). Other still non-specific conceptualizations are "a connective thread pulling together work on diasporic social formations and senses of identity" (Brah, 1996:191) and "experiences and political economies of migration, and forms of political engagement that escape or rework the borders of the nation-state" (Sheffer, 1995:11).

Especially the latter is focused on the dominant geographies of the nation-states whereas this study needs a broader conceptualization, which leaves room for the various dimensions of imaginative geographies. This room is needed in the first place because imaginative geographies are contested imagined images. And more importantly, because this research investigates the moldability by looking at the reconstruction of imaginative geographies. Moldability in itself asks for fluid borders.

Therefore this study worked with transnationalism as "an ongoing series of cross-border movement in which immigrants develop and maintain numerous economic, political, social and cultural links in more than one nation" (Mitchell, 2000: 853).

The definition above emphasizes the ontological assumption that "globalization/transnationalism [comes] from below" (Della Porta et al., 2006; Meyers, 2007; Bauböck, 1994:296-302). The phrases 'globalization from below' and 'transnationalism from below' are used interchangeably by Della Porta and her colleagues and their contemporaries. Mahler and Hansing (2005), on the other hand, argue that 'globalization from below' should be reserved for non-grassroots conceptualizations. At the same time, they argue that scholars should use 'transnationalism from below' in case they theorize about grassroots and in particular diaspora activities, because of the transnational nature of the position from where diaspora act.

Transnationalism considers a broad set of links, as transnationalism encompasses all kinds of social phenomena (Bauböck & Faist, 2010:15). This thesis focuses on a social movement which comes "from below" (Della Porta et al., 2006; Bauböck, 1994:296-302).

It can be argued that some transnational activities are not correctly understood in a dichotomous framework of 'from above' and 'from below,' as there are many "activities using middle levels of agency, as well as agencies that start out at opposite ends but intersect in the middle" (Mahler & Hansing, 2005:140-141). This means that grassroots activities can affect elite, and elite activities can devolve to the local individuals. In other words, transnationalism can also come from the middle (Mahler & Hansing, 2005).

Smith and Guarnizo (1998) argued that transnationalism comes from above and from below. 'From above' are the elite e.g. global capital, media, and political institutions which communicate with the objective to influence the local / grassroots individuals. 'From below' are the local / grassroots activities e.g. grassroots individuals who are organized in organizations or foundations with the objective to influence the elite (Meyers, 2007). For the purpose of analysis Portes (2001 & 2003) argued that the

grassroots individuals are “formally engaged” in transnational economic, political or socio-cultural activities. This research uses that advise to look at the activities of several Ukrainian diaspora foundations.

The movement of transnationalism can be further categorized into narrow and broad transnationalism (Itzigoshon et al., 1999). These categorizations focus on the amount of movement but do not take the reason for the activities into account. Guarnizo (1997, 2000), responding to that, defines core transnationalism as those activities that “(a) form an integral part of the individual’s habitual life; (b) are undertaken on a regular basis; and (c) are patterned and, therefore, somewhat predictable.” Hence, expanded transnationalism includes diaspora who get involved in political circumstances in the country of residences and/or origin.
The expanded transnationalism is used in this research, since the socio-political discourse wherein it is set gives reason to assume that the Ukrainian diaspora responds to political circumstances, regarding EuroMaidan and the referendum in the Netherlands. The epistemological emphasis on the loosening of fixed links between people and places leaves space for change in these links (Newman & Paasi, 1998; Faist, 2015). That diaspora is lower on the political ladder, in combination with their transnational links creates a unique position for (re)construction of the same imaginative geographies. It is this perspective that is central to this research.

This research follows in the footsteps of scholars who studied diaspora and in particular transnational protest and activism by starting from the assumption that transnationalism is from below (Della Porta et al., 2006; Bauböck & Faist, 2010:15).
This research focuses on the diaspora’s imagination, and not on the impact of their imagination and activism on higher socio-political actors. Therefore this research assumes that transnationalism comes from below.
The internet enables lower entities on the political ladder for example diaspora, to voice their opinion, and start social movements and activism.
In short, ‘transnationalism from below’ entails that from a bottom-up perspective, territory, political institutions and society are synchronizing with one another as diaspora activists communicate to the political elite. Notwithstanding that at the same time, political entities affect imaginative geographies from top-down since imaginative geographies are state and political elite dominated (Stephens, 2011:255; Chakrabarty, 2008:96). But here diaspora activists negotiate and contest imaginative geographies, which shows that transnationalism also comes from below, and not only from above.
This research looked at how transnational links are enacted by the Ukrainian diaspora activists and how these links play a role in their (re)construction of imaginative geographies as transnational citizens.

2.2. Imaginative geographies

This practice of constructing alternative representations of places and people is what Edward Said refers to as the “crafting of imaginative geographies” (Fields, 2008:234).
Said (1978) was the inventor of the concept ‘imaginative geographies’ in his work Orientalism. He encourages academics to rethink geography and topographies. Instead of thinking about cultures,

professions, and the realm of experiences as separate, this construction becomes hybrid, or to quote the man himself: “intertwined histories and overlapping territories.” Said argues that all activities and ideas need to be put in its history and corresponding context in time and place. Furthermore, he says that “universal ideas are part of the hegemonic exclusion in which imaginative geography has been a key factor” (Said in Al-Mahfedi, 2011:2). Here ‘imaginative’ is not to be understood as ‘false’ or ‘made-up,’ but rather as “perceived” (Al-Mahfedi, 2011:10).

Chakrabarty (2000) argued that other scholars do not pay enough attention to the imagination part of imaginative geographies. These scholars portray imagination of the political as a practice that is done by elite, whereby it is assumed that it is a singular practice (Chakrabarty, 2000:148). The imagination of geographies is also done by grassroots entities, such as diaspora. Therefore imagination is not a singular practice, but there is heterogeneity in imagination. By bringing heterogeneity back into the imagination part of imaginative geographies, the practice becomes an outspoken part of the ontology instead of a forgotten step of it.

This leads to the inclusion of different perspective in the academic debate of imaginative geographies, which is commonly dominated by political elite (Stephens, 2011:255; Chakrabarty, 2008:96). Since imaginative geographies are state-dominated they can be portrayed as static. Heterogeneity shows instead that imaginative geographies can be imagined differently and they are contested by their nature.

By giving way to heterogeneity, this research puts no restrictions on what informants can and cannot imagine as the Netherlands, Ukraine, and Europe. That is the reason that the imaginative geographies of the Netherlands, Ukraine, and Europe are not further defined regarding their historical, legal, cultural or economic background.

Stephens (2010:261) notes that by some scholars Orientalism represents ‘totality’ if they refuse to rethink the origins and limits of what people are capable of imagining. Both Gregory and Said (the two spiritual fathers of the popularized concept of imaginative geographies) see a direct relationship between the imaginative and the real geographies (Gregory, 2004:165-171). The imaginative geographies are representations to control and dominate the real geographies (they are “made to absorb everything”).

For Said, imaginative geographies are cultural processes of creating representation about places, and inventing the meaning of these places, meanwhile reinterpreting the people who already belong to the places which are imagined. According to Said imaginative geographies have two features.

2.2.1. Features: ‘creation of belonging’ & ‘creation of identities’

The first feature is the creation of belonging. By doing so, Said leans on, what he called, the ‘production of distance.’ Imaginative geographies sustain images of “our,” “home,” as well of “theirs” and “far away.” Therefore, imaginative geographies “help to intensify its sense of itself…” (Said, 1978: 55) This sense of itself is created by reflecting on the distinction between “real” and “perceived” distance between the already known space, “home,” and unknown and longed for space, which is far away. Imaginative geographies play a constitutive role in the creation of a sense of place through the understandings of belonging and non-belonging in space, in this study that is Ukraine, the Netherlands, and Europe. The meaning lies in the reflection on the production of distance.

The second feature is the creation of identities. By comparing 'our' space with 'their' space a difference of the spaces becomes clear in the mind of the person or group who makes the comparison (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Beech, 2014). Othering is experienced in the form of exclusion of space, which is expressed in categories of 'ours' and 'theirs.' Behind these categories, there are characteristics which apply to the people who go under 'ours,' while the people who do not live up to the characteristics go under 'theirs.' Identities are derived from the group characteristics wherein people find themselves.

Gregory puts a critical note on Said's conceptualization, as his work can be interpreted as the political elite is holding power over the meaning of these categories. "First, [1] who claims the power to fabricate those meanings? [2] Who assumes the power to represent other as other, and on what basis? … This attempt to muffle the others so that, at the limit, metropolitan cultures protect their powers and privileges by insisting that 'the subaltern cannot speak' raises the second question. [3] What is the power of those meanings?" (Gregory, 2004:8)?

Questions one and two hint at the issue that imaginative geographies portray the worldview of the political elite and introduce that what is needed to contest and transform the meaning of the categories. That, in combination with the third question, leads to the subject that frames the 'other' (not necessarily correctly) as the 'other': the topic of agency. Namely, Said assumes there is a direct relation between agency and the meaning of the categories. However, Said neglects that agency is not restricted to the politically powerful entities. Instead, agency belongs to every entity in the society at large. For that reason, labeling and categorizations of imaginative geographies can also be done by politically lower entities.

To not fall for the same mistake as Said, this research shifted the imagination perspective from a state entity to the politically lower perspective of the diaspora. In doing so, this research was able to integrate the way those lower entities negotiated, contested, and transformed the meaning and the categories which they labeled as the imaginative geographies at hand. In other words, "from below, we can study the "micropolitics" of categories, the ways in which the categorized appropriate, internalize, subvert, evade, or transform the categories that are imposed on them" (Brubaker, 2006:13).

2.2.2. Identity in the conceptualization of imaginative geographies

Another critique on Said that he does not specify is what kind of identity he refers to in the feature 'creation of identities'. His focus lies in the state and transnational spatial dimension of imaginative geographies. Therefore it is most likely that he talks about (trans)national identity (Al-Mafedi, 2011:4). In a later published article Said (1985) recognizes this unclarity and the criticism on it. He illustrates his position by discussing the Israeli transnational power relations with Palestine, and then how Israeli institutions incorporate this into the Israeli identity. For that reason, it can be argued that he indeed means (trans)national identity.

So far the features of imaginative geographies are clarified. However, a deeper understanding of how these imaginative geographies are constructed is still needed. Before these mechanisms are discussed, the discourse of identity needs to be looked into.

The 'creation of belonging' feature of imaginative geographies "help[s] the mind to intensify the sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and is far away" (Said, 1985:55). So imaginative geographies can be used as a strategy of identity construction which equalizes the distance of a faraway place with (cultural, ethnic, social) difference, "associating the non-spatial

characteristics of 'self' and 'other' with particular places" (Frank, 2009:71). This strategy works for both individual identity as for collective identity (Beech, 2014; Frank, 2009:71), even though Driver (2005) argues it works only for collective identity.
Lotman even argued that identity is cultural identity, as he wrote: "every culture begins by dividing the world into 'its own' internal space and 'their' external space" (1990:131). So this would leave imaginative geographies as a strategy to (re)construct national collective/individual - and even - cultural identity.
It goes to show that the identity construction and the construction of imaginative geographies are interconnected. Sakaja and Stanić (2011:501, 508) argued that political elite can transfer social and political norms and values that they labeled with the imaginative geography of Europe to the national identity of their citizens. Vanderbeck (2006) shows that norms and values are at the core of the imaginative geographies and the corresponding identities.
Since identity and imaginative geography constructions are interconnected, it can be argued that this research is about the identity, instead of imaginative geographies.
Though, the importance of the socio-political context wherein this research is set needs to be emphasized. The socio-political discourse creates a triangle of imaginative geographies and not identity, as it is not about the cultural or political rightful membership of diaspora in the country of residence.

Since diaspora is part of an ethnic minority in the country of residence, this research can also be set in a framework of ethnicity. Though, it was not enough to use the term ethnic minority, because of the focus on the political involvement in the country of residence which is central to this thesis. Also, the term 'ethnic minority' focuses on cultural assimilation, where this research went further and looked at the (re)construction of imaginative geographies of, among others, the country of assimilation/residence.

2.2.3. Construction mechanisms of imaginative geographies

By which mechanisms imaginative geographies are (re)constructed, does not become (completely) clear from Said's theory. This is one of the main critiques of Said's work (Al-Mahfedi, 2011). Said recognizes this in his response article (1985) and stresses the importance of "poetics of space" (1978:54), which he borrows from the French philosopher Bachelard (1964). He states that imaginative geographies are constructed through cultural processes, such as Orientalism. Said mentions 'poetics of space,' as a practical way, among others - even though he does not specify the 'others' - through which the construction process is expressed. According to Said 'poetics of space' includes texts, topics of public socio-political discourse.
Gregory (2004) agrees with Said about 'the poetics of space.' He calls it 'representations.' Gregory writes about representations as if it is the same as poetics of space; he adds two elements to Said's lists: images and topics of private discussions over the public socio-political discourse.
This apparent sameness is incorrect since Said referred to solely narratives and not any other forms of representations referring to images, as Gregory does.
For that reason, this research labels the first mechanism as 'representations,' but applies a division into symbols and narratives. Gregory (2004) argued that images, texts, and dialogues are feeding off each other. Symbols are both online and offline based footage. It includes online shared pictures via social media of pictures of both activities in public space and private settings. It also includes offline texts of

flyers, banners of demonstrations and activities. For the purpose of analysis, the distinction of on- and offline is made.
Narratives are stories, anecdotes for example about big topics (Friedman, 2012), such as the plane crash of MH17, EuroMaidan, the referendum on the Association Agreement and the annexation of Crimea. Furthermore, it includes online texts, such as blogs, and via social media shared articles. The latter online narratives will be put under symbols, for analytic purposes. It also includes oral held dialogues and discusses in which opinions about the discussed topic at hand is disclosed.
Said mentions cultural practices which can be labeled as a second mechanism. According to him, imaginative geographies are sustained by cultural practices. However, 'sustain' is not the same as 'construct.' Darryl (2008: np) feels indeed that he can go along with Said's opinion as long as he takes the liberty to read between his lines. Darryl argues that Said's 'poetics of space' is already a cultural practice. Al-Mahfedi (2011) on the other hand, feels that cultural practices are not clear in Said's reasoning. Though, Al-Mahfedi makes a side note that he would agree with a statement that cultural practices run in the background throughout 'Orientalism.'
The complexity of imaginative geographies becomes clear here when it can even be reasoned that imagining geographies on itself is a cultural practice which is a "curiously undiscussed category in social science writings" (Chakrabarty, 2000:149).
What does become clear is that cultural practices are a wide range of actions, from working (paid and voluntarily) to voting, and from committing a bomb attack to painting murals (Stephens, 2011:261). But all of these practices are relevant to the construction of imaginative geographies as they have a political objective to them.

A clear consensus is the third mechanism. By building further on Said's notion of production of distance, Gregory came up with: imaginative geographies are performative. Imaginative geographies are performative as "they produce the effects that they name" (Gregory, 1994). This way space is "doing."
'Performativity' covers two sides of the same coin, of which only the first side is mentioned by Gregory. Namely, the first side is that imaginative geographies perform their meaning (Gregory, 1994; 2004). The second side is that this meaning can be found in the performances of the people. The latter indicates that people (re)construct imaginative geographies through performances, such as demonstrations, and the organization and attendance of cultural and political activities.

It is important to note, that all three (re)construction mechanisms are very closely linked. Especially the mechanisms 'practices' and 'performances' are hard to distinguish from one another. In the literature, there is no empirical data which illustrates the difference between practices and performance in the construction process of imaginative geographies. For that reason, the second mechanism ('practices') is part of 'performance.' This leaves a conceptualization two mechanisms which (re)construct imaginative geographies. A summary of the conceptualization of imaginative geographies can be found in figure 1.

Features of imaginative geographies:

- Creation of belonging
- Creation of identity

Mechanisms to (re)construct imaginative geographies:

- Representations
  - Symbols
  - Narratives
- Practices / Performances

Figure 1

The construction mechanism of representations (especially motivational narratives about activism) is present in public and private sphere (Della Porta & Diani, 2006:47-49). The public sphere is both on- and offline.

The online world of social media plays an increasing role in the facilitation and unification of social movements, especially in the case of grassroots and activism by diaspora (Aelst and Walgrave 2004:121; Della Porta & Diani, 2006:114-118; Pini, Brown, and Previte, 2004). Therefore the online and offline worlds are part of the construction mechanisms of imaginative geographies. This research look at imaginative geographies through civic participation, as people express both of representations and practices/performance in civic participation.

2.3. Civic participation

Civic participation is a form wherein imaginative geographies are (publically) expressed. In this world where people move abroad and live a transnational life, their lives are divided over two or multiple states. These people become part of multiple societies. In a globalized world, the socio-political discourses in societies (in combination with individual opinions and observations that create the feeling of a need to step in the societal discourses) create a need for people to express their opinions publically, on- and offline, and take action in the collective promotion of their opinions. In other words, people can become civically active. The opinions which are expressed in civic participation contain specific information about how people think about a topic. Information about imaginative geographies is observable from civic participation when the socio-political discourse touches with the societal position of people.

The Ukrainian diaspora in the Netherlands united themselves in different foundations from which they organized activities during the socio-political discourse of the referendum. Also, this illustrates they had social, political and cultural links to Ukraine and the Netherlands. Important to note is the emphasis here lies on the collective and not individual ways of being civically active.

Active public involvement in exercising citizenship rights is part of citizenship practice (Preston et al., 2006:1634). Citizenship practice is mostly revealed by civic participation. Recalling that the research location is the country of residence, instead of the country of origin, it needs to be understood that citizenship is used regardless of the legal status of a person being civically active.

Commonly this is not the case since there is a mismatch of citizenship as a legal status of a territorially bounded state with diaspora possessing that status but living outside of the state's territory. This is one

of the broadest definitions of citizenship, and the focus is only on the (legal) status dimension of citizenship (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Citizenship comes down to the relationship between the individual and the representative state apparatus (Tilly, 1975:32). To study citizenship practice (and therefore civic participation), it needs to be understood that citizenship is made up out of three elements: "individual and state citizenship practice and the relationship between those two. [...] [These elements] are called the *constitutive elements of citizenship* as any study related to citizenship referred to these elements in one way or another" (Wiener & Della Sala, 1997:602). The relational element became to be understood as important since people living in society can contribute to the creation of the community and its identity (Staeheli & Nagel, 2004). This relation aspect has not received much academic attention (Wiener & Della Sala, 1997), but this is where this research steps in by looking at the civic participation.

In the country of residence, any individual can engage in civic participation, not only people who have legal status (e.g. passport) in the country of residence. In a diaspora community, some people have legal status, where others do not. Remember, the diaspora has several links to both their country of origin and their country of residence. Civic participation is when a person invests time in publically vocalizing their opinion about topics which have strong connotations with their position in the society. In the case of diaspora, that is a transnational position. The transnational position of a person in a country of residence can create civic participation. This is the case the moment the public socio-political discourse in their country of residence is about their country of origin. At the same time, the content about their country of origin in the public socio-political discourse is not in line with their opinion about their country of origin.

Civic participation is often labeled as a strong public involvement in politics or volunteer work (Preston et al., 2006:1634; Ehrkamp, 2006).

Despite that the emphasis of civic participation lies on the public involvement, the private sphere also needs to be incorporated. People observe the socio-political discourse from the privacy of their home via newspaper, television, or internet. And then, they decide to involve or not to involve in politics. Therefore, the reasons to become civically active are rooted in the private sphere (Della Porta & Diani, 2006:47-49). The motivational reasons to take on civic participation are included in this research.

Civic participation can take different forms of political involvement. Civic participation takes the form of civic activism when it is part of an ongoing social movement.

Civic activism can take form in individual and collective activism. Both types of activism can be manifested in organized activism. Individual (civic) activism is, for example, wearing a campaign badge, signing a petition, and voting in the election. The organization and attendance of demonstration in public places and public political debates are examples of collective (civic) activism. Transnational (collective) activism is when diaspora take on collective activism (Ehrkamp, 2006). 'Transnational' refers here to the transnational position of the activists.

The activists unite their political participation collectively around the referendum through linking themselves to the foundation, 'Oekraïners in Nederland.'

The intensification of transnational activities by diaspora through involvement at both the country of residence and origin (Portes, 1997; Portes et al., 1999), transforms citizenship, the citizenship practices and the identities which are deriving from these practices – for the diaspora and the countries to which they move (Fiast, 1999; 2000).

An increase in civic participation shows a sense of belonging and is “an indication of the attachment that is fundamental to identification as a citizen” (Bloemraad, 2000; in Preston et al., 2006:1634).
More importantly, civic participation enables the possibility to research the (re)construction of imaginative geographies. Firstly, because of the position of the people who are civic participating.
The position in society sets a stage for the reason why that person becomes civically active. People that become civically active signal that they perceive something as incorrect, missing, lacking or incomplete within the public socio-political discourse in the society where they reside. Diaspora observes and experiences the social-political discourse in the country of residence, and as a result, they see that what they consider as the meaning of the imaginative geographies in the discourse is not in line what is being portrayed as the imaginative geographies by fellow society members and politicians as such in the discourse.
The transnational position of diaspora facilitates the stepping stone to negotiate, transform, and contest the imaginative geographies of their country of origin and the country of residence. Namely, the moment the mental associations they have with their country of origin is not in line with the public socio-political debate about the country of origin in the country of residence there is a mismatch of categorization about their country of origin. By civic participation, they tried to negotiate and contest these imaginative geographies.
Secondly, the public involvement in activism shows the activists’ awareness of what they do and do not categorize for the imaginative geography of, for example, Europe. Also, transnational collective activism shows their proactive attitude towards negotiation and restoration of the categorizations and dichotomizations of imaginative geographies. This signaled a willingness to talk about these issues with people in a different, non-transnational position, such as a researcher. In contrast to diaspora members that are less or not involved in activism have more difficulty explaining their imagination of imaginative geographies. Therefore, diaspora activists are aware of their imagination process of the imaginative geographies in the socio-political discourse, which makes them more eligible to reflect on their actions and their goals regarding their civic participation.
In short, civic participation is the exercise of citizenship rights in the country of residence. Here, the political involvement in the public sphere is rooted in the private sphere. The public involvement in politics refers to this research to civic activism because the diaspora is organized in several foundations which have a transnational background. In their transnational collective activism diaspora activists express the (re)construction mechanisms of imaginative geographies: performances (public activities); practices (voting); offline representations (e.g. national flags during activities and the narratives which explain the labeling of these flags); online representations (e.g. recorded/performed protest songs).

3. Research objective

This research investigates how Ukrainians diaspora in the Netherlands contest/negotiate/transform the imaginative geographies of the Netherlands, Ukraine and Europe. The construction/contestation process will be studied by looking at civic participation and more specifically civic activism. This research will explore the representations and practices/performances expressed by active members of Ukrainian diaspora in the Netherlands. In doing so, this research provides a better understanding of the bottom-up perspective on imaginative geographies.

Contestation, negotiation, and transformation signal a process. It is not the complete process which this research investigates. Instead, this research illustrates the (re)construction of imaginative geographies of the country of origin, country of residence and Europe, including potential differences and commonalities.

3.1. Main research question

How do Ukrainian diaspora activists in the Netherlands by civic participation negotiate/contest/transform the triangle of imaginative geographies of the Netherlands, Ukraine, and Europe?

3.1.1. Sub research questions

- How do Ukrainian diaspora activists use online and offline symbols to negotiate/contest/transform imaginative geographies of the Netherlands; Ukraine; and Europe?
- How do Ukrainian diaspora activists use narratives to negotiate/contest/transform imaginative geographies of the Netherlands; Ukraine; and Europe?
- How do Ukrainians diaspora activists use publically and private practices and performances to negotiate/contest/transform imaginative geographies of the Netherlands; Ukraine; and Europe?

3.2. Scientific relevance

This research listened to the call of Newman and Paasi (1998:200) for more research into the symbolic and – what they interchangeably called 'imagined' and 'imaginative'[7] spaces within the academic boundary approach.

The (re)construction of imaginative geographies has created a perceived fixation of geographies and its borders, because of imaginative geographies are predominantly researched from state and political elite's perspective. This research, on the other hand, took on a 'bottom-up' perspective to (re)construction of imaginative geographies.

In the literature, there was a call for detailed "understanding of the relationship between transnationalism and citizenship participation (Preston et al., 2006: 1633)." Civic participation was often researched in the country of origin (Preston et al., 2006: 1635). This research, instead, moves this focus to the country of residence, since this is where the civic participation took place. This research will give a

[7] Jackson et al. (2004) point out that according to them imagined geographies and imaginative geographies are the same concepts, since imagination is the noun of the verb 'to imagine.'

detailed analysis of Ukrainian activists in the Netherlands in their (re)construction of three different imaginative geographies at the same time.

4. Methodology

The theoretical framework which was included in the research proposal was taken as the starting point to conduct the research. The theoretical framework is a starting point to position the research in an academic debate. Furthermore, the theoretical framework is used to add empirical patterns to the existing theoretical body of knowledge about the (re)construction of imaginative geographies. This research investigated the (re)construction of imaginative geographies of Ukrainian diaspora activists which are intertwined with its socio-political context, therefore, the diaspora activists and their imaginative geographies are studied closely alongside one another. The combination of the inductive process and focus of this research makes it a qualitative case study based research.

4.1. Ontological and epistemological assumptions

It is necessary to lay out the assumptions of the research, as the researcher was aware throughout the research of several ontological, epistemological and methodological roots of her thoughts.

At the foundation of the theoretical framework, it is assumed that borders are fluid, instead of fixed. The theoretical debate hooks into the phenomenon of a group of people living in a European country. These people are publicly involved in politics by civic activism to promote their opinion about their country of origin, a non-European country, and how that country has European ties and whether or not it should integrate further towards the European Union. The civic participation of these group of diaspora members illustrates that European borders are not the same to everyone, and they are moldable to everyone's position of imagination. In other words, the ongoing socio-political debate about who belongs to Europe and what the foundational norms and values of Europe suggest that the fluidity of the European borders can be drawn differently depending on the criteria.

There is an academic consensus about the state/political elite dominance on the imaginative geographies that common people/citizens have of the state (Gerber, 2008:207; Dietze, 2008:83; Stephens, 2011:255; Chakrabarty, 2008:96). This dominance creates a false sense of fixation of borders. Namely, the meaning enclosed within those borders changes when the perspective is shifted towards bottom-up.

The bottom-up approach assumes that 'transnationalism [comes] from below (Della Porta et al., 2006).'

The social, cultural, economic and political links that diaspora has between Ukraine and Europe and Ukraine and the Netherlands are transnational links. The activists maintain links to Ukraine by promoting Ukraine within the Netherlands. The maintenance is expressed in civic participation.

The third assumption is that civic participation can be used by non-state actors (diaspora activists) to contesting, negotiating and transforming the state domination of the construction of imaginative geographies. Contestation, negotiation, and transformation do not entail the objective to change the state's policies to enforce imaginative geographies. Instead, these three verbs have the objective to look into how diaspora activists contested, negotiated and transformed the state-dominated image for themselves.

By investigating people who invest a lot of time in their civic participation, it is possible to research the (re)construction of their imaginative geographies. In this case, the civic participation is organized from diaspora foundations in the Netherlands by organizing and attending political and cultural activities; and organizing and attending demonstrations in the Netherlands during the time of EuroMaidan. By studying

civic participation, more insight is gathered in the (re)construction of imaginative geographies for two reasons.

The first reason rests on the position wherein people who express their civic participation. People that become civically active with transnational links signal that they perceive something is incorrect, missing, lacking or incomplete within the socio-political discourse in the country of residence. Ukrainian diaspora activists observe and experience the social-political context in the Netherlands, and as a result, they see that the labels that they use to describe Ukraine, the Netherlands, and Europe are not in line what is portrayed as such in the socio-political discourse in the Netherlands. Considering the socio-political discourse in the Netherlands, the Ukrainian diaspora activists find themselves in a triangle of imaginative geographies.

Secondly, because they are actively involved in the (re)construction of imaginative geographies for themselves, they have ideas and thoughts about the triangle of imaginative geographies which they can explain to a third person (researcher). These activists are aware of what they want to contribute, which makes them more eligible to reflect on their involvement. Other than, diaspora members who are not publically involved.

4.2. Access & Sample

One of the foundations of the Ukrainian diaspora is called 'Oekraïners in Nederland' ("Ukrainians in the Netherlands"). Upon a full-time internship for the duration of three months was agreed after having contact with one of the board members.

The researcher was introduced to different people via various projects and activities. The researcher requested interviews with people who she met several times or whose names were mentioned many times by board members. The researcher got introduced to board members and active volunteers of another Ukrainian diaspora foundation, "Brand New Ukraine," with the snowball effect.

During the period of the internship, the vast majority of the participant observation was done. A couple of interviews were held after the internship was finished. The empirical data represented in the following chapters are a result of the activities, conversations, and interviews as a result of the following tasks and projects of the internship.

The researcher came up with her own project during the internship, which she called "Ukrainians of the Netherlands," in which she briefly interviewed volunteers who, according to the board of the foundation, deserved a spotlight. The researcher wrote short texts which were based on the conversations. The texts were almost a transcription of the mini-interviews. By taking notes and writing out a piece of text within two to three days, it was sent back and forth between the interviewee and the researcher, so the result represented the interviewee's opinion as best as possible, and it was posted with complete consent posted on the Facebook page of the foundation. These texts were posted along with an (optional) profile picture of the interviewee's choice.

In addition to that project, the researcher approached potential funds and subsidies on behalf of the board. Furthermore, she wrote letters and e-mails to hospitals to investigate potential cooperation for humanitarian actions for Ukraine. And she made contact with the mayor of the Hague and Groningen to initiate a dialogue about opening a Ukrainian cultural center in those cities.

Also, the researcher helped to brainstorm about and organize activities such as conference about the Ukrainian history of Babyn Yar and Holodomor, which opened on the 4th of October 2016. Furthermore, she helped to organize a conference titled “Current Day of Crimea.” Unfortunately, because of political reasons, the location canceled and it was postponed until a later moment. And the researcher was present during the annual Embassy Festival in The Hague, at the booth of the Ukrainian Embassy. Also, she helped to explore the ways of organizing an exhibition of the Ukrainian painter Maria Prymachenko, who is also known as the Ukrainian Van Gogh. As for now, because of financial and juridical reasons, this project was put on hold. And the researcher helped another diaspora organization, ‘Brand New Ukraine’ with setting up an exhibition in The Hague “Displaced. 12 stories from Ukraine”.

The time that informants lived in the Netherlands varied on a scale from two years up to sixteen and more years. The Ukrainian diaspora activists’ community itself is varying in the number of years which people lived in the Netherlands. The average number of years of living in the Netherlands of the 18 informants was just over ten years. In the research sample, a range of numbers of years that informants lived in the Netherlands is created to form an equivalent representation of the Ukrainian diaspora activists’ community in the Netherlands.

A vast majority of the informants (14 out of 18) spoke the Dutch language fluently and felt that they knew the background of most Dutch holidays and traditions. Nevertheless, informants said it themselves: in their character and hearts, they remain Ukrainians. Informants described themselves and the Ukrainian cultural as emotional, social, and expressive. The first couple of weeks the researcher had difficulty with posing questions which were rightly balanced between straightforwardness to get information, and cultural sensitiveness to not evoke an expressive and aversive reaction by the informants. Time learned the researcher that the emotional and expressive reactions were not against the researcher herself or her questions, but it was part of the communication style of Ukrainian diaspora members.

The cultural communication difference influenced the first couple of weeks participations and casual conversations. The data of that period is more politically correct and superficial compared to interactions and answers on the same topics later in the field research period.

4.2.1. Facebook

The researcher did not post anything directly related to Russia, Putin, MH17, etcetera, at the time of her internship because she tried not add the Facebook feed of Ukrainian diaspora Facebook friends with her opinion in their Facebook feed. Before she started the internship, she did post a text message to call upon Dutch friends to vote for the Association Agreement. The researcher decided to leave the post online. Therefore, informants who took the effort to find out what the researcher’s opinion was about the referendum were able to do so. Even though the researcher was not neutral regarding the socio-political discourse which she researched, it was a supportive opinion of the informants’ activism during the referendum. She decided not to delete it from her personal wall, as it could benefit the way she would gain access to and trust of the community of Ukrainian diaspora activists.

The researcher sent a couple of volunteers Facebook friends request to people who were highly active on Facebook pages of the Ukrainian community in the Netherlands. The researcher was curious to see what kind of content they posted on their private Facebook walls. The researcher did not meet all the

people behind these profiles. To be transparent in the role of being a researcher, the “friend requests” (as Facebook calls in an invitation to view each other's pages) were accompanied with a message wherein she explained who she was, described the objective of the research and that she was an intern at “Oekraïners in Nederland.”

4.2.2. Limitations with access and sample

The researcher was aware that she was an outsider to the Ukrainian diaspora in the Netherlands. This became evident, for example in the friend requests that she had to send. She was a civic national member of the society which voted against the Association Agreement. That made her perspective to have an undeniable bias. Though, as the researcher carried out the research, her opinion about her country of origin changed. First of all, the research gave a close-up illustration of how people are connected to each other. The content of the referendum showed to her that people at the other side of Europe talked about and watched the decision that Dutch citizens made. So her country of origin affects more people their lives than Dutch people.

In addition to that, informants felt personally addressed by, first of all, the outcome of the referendum, and secondly, the way the socio-political discourse was shaped. The researcher was emotionally touched by her informant’s expression of a feeling of exclusion to the country of residence since she experienced a connection with her informants who lived in the same country as her.

The researcher became more aware of the informants’ experiences of friction in the feeling of membership to the country of residence. These topics were relevant for the notion of ‘sense of belonging’ to the country of residence. A sense of belonging was described by Said (1978) as part of the concept ‘imaginative geographies’. And Bloemraad (2000) included the same notion of belonging in his description of ‘civic participation’. Informants said that they did not open up about their experiences with native Dutch people, because generally, they were not willing to talk about socio-political and cultural topics with immigrants, such as the Ukrainian diaspora. Since the researcher, on the other hand, was willing to talk about these topics, she gained the trust of informants to talk about a highly sensitive topic. The researcher opened up about her opinion on the topic of membership. Thereby informants felt comfortable to express criticism on the society of residence, without being ignored by a legal and native member of that society.

In case a researcher starts from an insider perspective in the Ukrainian diaspora it creates a likeliness to overlook the positive or the negative experiences of the informants as he or she takes those aspects for granted and does not include it in the narrative of the research population. The outsider position of the researcher of this research created fertile soil for an open and trustful space to talk about the negative experience the country of residence.

Another added value of the researcher’s outsider position was that informants felt that she was one of the few native Dutch people that wanted to hear everything about their opinion regarding the Association Agreement and the referendum. Their appreciation showed in a willingness to explain in detail their thought processes, even if it seemed obvious to informants but not to the researcher.

The vast majority of the informants (and volunteers at the diaspora foundations) was female. It was easy for the researcher to blend in because she did not notice any frictions based on gender issues. On the

other hand, age and nationality caused some hesitation to talk freely about Ukraine and international politics, as informants told the researcher at the end of the field research period. The average age of the Ukrainian active members at the foundations was forties years old. Age difference - because of the researcher's age (26), in combination with her Dutch nationality, made most of the activists hesitant to open up to her. Informants were on guard because they did not know her opinion about the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine (Don Bas), Russia and its relation towards Ukraine and the European Union. The researcher built up a trust by "being there" (Davis & Konner, 2011), being around and talking about daily topics (such as shops, cities, and traveling). During daily chats and conversations informants started to talk more openly about these sensitive topics. Especially, informants opened up after they got to know that the researcher was genuinely interested in the informants' opinions, their reasons to be active at the diaspora foundations and that she was present at the demonstration for the Association Agreement in Amsterdam.

The paragraph 4.2. touched upon the varying periods of residence which is included in the research sample. The number of years in the country of residence will influence the labeling and categorization of the imaginative geography of the Netherlands - and potentially Europe and Ukraine. Therefore, the equal number of informants with a shorter and longer residence period in the Netherlands equalized a potential difference in the categorization of 'the Netherlands'. Two informants in the sample moved two years ago to the Netherlands and an equal number of informants lived for more than sixteen years in the Netherlands.
The Ukrainian diaspora activists in the Netherlands were a community who lived for varying number of years in the Netherlands and will have different imaginative geographies of the Netherlands. The research sample included informants with varying periods of residence in the Netherlands to have a truthful representation of the Ukrainian diaspora activists.

4.3. Methods

4.3.1. Participant observation

During the months of the internship, participant observation was used to observe and take part in the following aspects of their lives: what kind of activities they organize and attend; their views about their transnational position in the Netherlands in public and private; their views about their transnational position in Ukraine in public and private; their views on the relation between Ukraine and Europe; their views on Europe and the European Union; what Ukrainian activists created online and offline in order for them to spread their message(s); and what topics they online and offline talked about among each other in public and private.
Observation targetted the (online/offline) symbols, (online/offline) images, narratives, (online/offline) practices and performances of imaginative geographies. Participation added the understanding of the meaning of all these mechanisms, as it created the opportunity to take part in and observe, what people did. The sole use of the interview method would have limited the understanding of the meaning of behavior. Consequently, the behavior itself was left out.
To surpass the pitfall of only focusing on one time on- and offline activities, the researcher was in close (almost daily) contact with members of the board of the internship foundation. Furthermore, informants

were met over the duration of three months during different kinds of activities and social gatherings. That way, diaspora activists got to know the researcher. Also, the researcher was able to see informants in different circumstances and contexts.
Also on Facebook, the researcher was invited to several Ukrainian community Facebook groups and pages, whereby she was able to follow the communication, chats, and posts between Ukrainian diaspora members on a daily basis.
The information gathered during participant observation was discussed in a private setting to understand better the details and thought processes behind the observed conversations.
During activities, for example, the annual Embassy Festival in the Hague, the researcher felt excluded in the middle of a group of Ukrainians. The sense of exclusion was due to the activists speaking Ukrainian between each other. This way the researcher was not able to understand the conversation between them, but she was able to understand the Dutch and English conversation they had with visitors of the stands. In those conversations, the researcher heard what they told visitors about Ukraine which was valuable information for their (re)construction of the imaginative geography of Ukraine.

4.3.2. Limitations of participant observation

Informants were not always fluent in Dutch or English. The researcher did not speak Ukrainian or Russian. The moments the researcher had trouble to understand an informant, she repeated what the informant said, or she asked for an explanation. This way the researcher made sure the meaning was understood correctly.
Despite the occasional language barrier, the researcher was able to take part in the activities, and she was able to observe the body language, the social interaction, and atmosphere. During the activities, she had brief conversations with the activists, which enabled an update about what was going on according to participants.
Questions were posed about the observations during interviews. The downside of the belated reflection of these observations is that there was not a direct response to what was going on during the activity. People were able to perceive it differently later than at the spot. The discrepancy was stopped by comparing the belated answers with the answers to the interview questions.

The researcher was aware that participant observation did not give an exact description of how Ukrainian diaspora activists organized and experienced demonstrations and activities. First of all, because all demonstrations and some activities took place outside of this field research period. Secondly, because participant observation does not provide a complete insight, but it approximated it. Consequently, for these two reasons, this research relies on both the capacity of reflection and communication of informants. Therefore, the researcher needed to select informants who were both capable to reflect on their positions and the reasons to become activists. In addition, these informants needed to be able to communicate these points of view. Also, the different points of view were constantly compared during the period of analyses to make sure that the data was saturated and the diasporas' experiences were as well as possible represented on paper as in reality.

4.3.3. Interviews

The research used a combination of in-depth semi-structured interviews, for all eighteen interviews. (An interview overview can be found in Appendix A.)
The reason semi-structured interviews were used, is because not all informants had the same tasks and goals within the Ukrainian community in the Netherlands and the foundation(s). For this reason, the researcher was not able to ask identical questions to every informant. Also, the researcher needed a rich and detailed description of accounts of activities from the diaspora activists perspective and their feelings described in their words. Semi-structured interviews have the invaluable quality of providing these descriptions to create a narrative.

Not all interviews were held in person, as three interviews were held over Skype. These informants preferred Skype over interviews in person, because of time management. Also, the researcher believed that informants are comfortable with interaction on social media as that is the main communication tool within the Ukrainian community in the Netherlands. To compensate a little bit for the loss of body language because of the use of Skype, the interviewer paid extra attention to intonation and facial mimic. Even though the researcher wanted interviews to be held in person, she prioritized interviewees to feel comfortable with the circumstances of the interviews.
Three interviews were not recorded because people were afraid of giving sensitive information about their friends, their family, and their opinion about Russia. They did not want to leave any traces of participation in this research that would get back to their social relations or themselves. So the interviewer took notes and transcribed the interviews based on of those notes and mental notes.

The interviews had the same build up and the same order of topics. The interviewer reacted to the answers which led to a slightly different order of topics if the interviewee brought up a topic earlier than on the topic list. An impression of the topic list can be found in Appendix B.
As the analysis went on and the different phases of coding passed the topic list changed slightly. When the interviewer saw the need to gain more inside knowledge about a specific sub-topic, some questions were added to that topic. To protect the validation of the topic list one sub-topic per interview was added.
Questions were posted based on the topic list. As often as possible the questions were open-ended. In the flow of the interview, it was difficult for the interviewer to always ask open-ended questions. If a closed question was asked, it was followed up with an open-ended question, so the reasons behind actions or thinking process were still explained. This was not needed with all informants because most of the informants talked comfortably and with ease. The attitude of informants made the interview process easier to get information for the interviewer.

The conceptualization of imaginative geographies formed an analytical limitation. Both the on- and offline realities wherein imaginative geographies are constructed, as the construction mechanisms of imaginative geographies are interconnected. For example, there exists a blurred line between on- and offline performances. The act to write a blog or a song is a performance. But the blog itself can easily be treated as a symbol. Or, sharing an article about European politics or writing a post about a quote from a Dutch politician on Facebook or posting a picture of a ‘vyshyvanka’ (traditional Ukrainian blouse) on a

website are performances of imaginative geographies. Also, a banner at an activity is a symbol, but it can also be part of performances, for example of a banner at a demonstration.
Visuals were shown during interviews to overcome this limitation.

Visuals were online symbols of pictures and posts which were created and uploaded by interviewees on their personal Facebook pages. Visuals were also pictures of offline symbols such as attributes of activities, e.g. flags. These Facebook based visuals are relevant to take into account since it shows their empowerment and initiative to share a message. On top of that, visuals helped the researcher to see features of the (re)construction of imaginative geographies that otherwise were overlooked with the solely the use of participant observation and interviews. A deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of symbols and narratives is enabled by confronting informants with pictures and posts of, to name a few, the posters informants made/used during demonstrations, the European flag in the context of demonstrations in the Netherlands and EuroMaidan, and links to websites with information about the Association Agreement.

The visuals on Facebook were used because interviewees uploaded the images out of free choice. Especially, they shared a message and an interpretation of their views on imaginative geographies with these online visuals. By the incorporation of these visuals in the interviews, the message, meaning, interpretation and intention of sharing of these visuals are included in the research. On top of that, Facebook is a high frequently used media to share textual and images which are part of the (re)construction of imaginative geographies (Said, 1978; Gregory, 2004).
For the first six interviews, the interviewer tried to go over the content on their Facebook page with the interviewee, to give them the agency over the highlighted representations. Unfortunately, this took too much time, which made an interview a tiresome experience for both parties. From then on, the researcher took (with the informant consent) visuals from the informant's Facebook page. Visuals were the online depictions of national flags; national colors; traditional clothes in pictures; pictures of demonstration during EuroMaidan; pictures demonstrations in the months leading up to the referendum; online shares of articles about the political debate around the referendum and the outcome of the referendum; and pictures of remembrances of the airplane crash of the MH17 on Ukrainian territory with a majority of Dutch citizens on board. These pictures and posts were selected based on the kind of visuals interviewees explained during the experience of the first six interviews.

4.3.4. Limitations of interviews

The semi-structured in-depth interviews had the possible side effect that informants told more about topics than they intended, and regretting do so in hindsight. For that reason, the interviewer repeatedly reminded interviewee's that they did not have to answer questions if they did not want to and that they were entitled to stop the interview at any moment and for any reason.
On top of that, informants informed the researcher that they did not say anything negative about Russia in public (online and offline) during the fourth and fifth interviews. This came to the service when informants explained the political situation of Ukraine, regarding the demonstrations and activities they attended. Up till that point, the interviewer never posed any questions about informants' opinions about Russia. Interestingly, more informants informed the interviewer of this was a no-go topic in

public, but the same informants explained explicitly that the interviewer had to understand the role that Russia played in Ukraine and for Ukrainians.

After the researcher did some interviews another methodological limitation appeared. As activists shared their interview experiences with other diaspora members, the interviewees of later held interviews were able to mature in their expectancies about the to-be-discussed topics and questions. Hereby, some informants were able to prepare and they may have been more able to go into more depth during the interviews. In turn, the potential bias about the interview that these informants were able to develop was also beneficial for the depth of the research.

Another limitation of qualitative methods such as interviews became evident in this report. Namely, the selection of quotations and illustrations was done by the researcher. The subjectivity of these quotations and illustrations was the responsibility of the researcher, as it was to her best judgment to select the most representative quote or illustration out of the collected data to fit the most frequently discussed (sub)topics.

4.3.5. Justification used methods

This research wanted to gain new insights into the (re)construction of imaginative geographies from a bottom-up perspective. This construction process revolved around a series of socio-political topics. In order to gain inside information about their imaginative geographies trust was demanded between the researcher and the informants. This assessment turned out to be correct because part of the categorization and dichotomization was hidden in private narratives, as will be discussed in chapter six. Especially in-depth semi-structured interviews provided this insight. Furthermore, this research used the methods of participant observation and visuals during the interviews.

A questionnaire was not applicable to the research objective. A questionnaire could provide information about patterns of usage of offline symbols, but it would not provide information about narratives behind practices and performances and representations. These (re)construction mechanisms were deemed to be crucial by both Said and Gregory in the (re)construction of imaginative geographies. Furthermore, a questionnaire would not have built up the trust that was needed to come to the insight of hidden categorization.

The participant observation gave the advantage of observation of the behavior (practice and performance) and, at the same time, understanding of narratives behind the behavior.

(In-depth semi-structured) Interviews gave an additional advantage over less qualitative methods such as questionnaires (or even quantitative methods), as these narratives needed to be discussed in detail in order for the researcher to be able to draw conclusions. In addition, interviews were needed to understand and learn the interpretations and narratives behind the on- and offline symbols and pictures. With the usage of other methods, it was not possible to incorporate the detailed narratives into the analysis since the symbols and pictures were results of the agency of the informants. Standardized symbols and pictures were not applicable because those left out the agency which is important in the heterogeneity in the imagination of imaginative geographies (Said, 1978; Chakrabarty, 2000).

4.4. Analysis

Informants were anonymized after all interviews were conducted and transcribed. Some informants wanted to be anonymized, and others did not. The researcher decided to anonymize all informants since all informants are linked to each other via diaspora foundations and the Ukrainian community in the Netherlands. On top of that, all of them shared personal information in this research whereby a third party would be able to find out the informants who requested to be anonymized when others would not be anonymized.

The researcher observed and compared the data after open - and for the most part n-Vivo - coding every third or fourth interview. Codes that had the same meaning were merged into one code. For example, names of Dutch politicians, codes from the Ukrainian flag and the European flag, the different emotional experiences about the outcome of the referendum. Other codes where informants were mentioning Russia were compared and categorized according to their context: such as Russian friends (which is later deleted), Russia as a historical influence on Ukraine, Russia as a political influence on the EU. For a new quotation to be added to the existing code, it had to fit the description which was given to each code.

Subsequently, after nine interviews were held, transcribed and open coded, categories over the codes were created based on the two mechanisms of the construction of imaginative geographies as depicted in figure 2. As this research has as the research objective to investigate how diaspora contest, negotiate and transform a triangle of imaginative geographies on the basis of two mechanisms, the following structure in the code-categories was made:

'Representations' formed the main category under each imaginative geography with 'symbols' and 'narratives' as sub-categories. There is no further distinction made between online and offline symbols, since on- and offline symbols were present in the data and most online symbols were discussed in offline interviews. The online symbols which were used as visuals during interviews were coded under the sub-category 'symbols.' And the derived narratives from the meaning of these symbols were captured under the sub-category of 'narratives.' 'Performance' is the main second category, with 'activities' as sub-categories.

Ukraine has a sub-sub-category of 'culture' with codes which have to do with Ukrainian culture, such as traditional clothing, cuisine, and music which were observed by the researcher or frequently verbally labeled by the informants as 'Ukrainian culture.'

Figure 2

Narratives are defined as stories about topics that were repeatedly discussed among informants and were topics in politics and society. For example, narratives are the effect of the airplane crash of the MH17; the annexation of Crimea; experienced in the Ukrainian news and by Ukrainian people.

The quotations under 'activities' dealt with the attendance and organization of cultural and political activities. It also included the goals which informants said they had with the organization and attendance of these activities and the attributes they used during the activities.

‘Private’ formed the sub-category for aspects of performances that dealt with the private lives of informants. For example, it included their voting behavior, following the political debate, and the jobs they had.

The last nine remaining interviews were purposively coded according to the existing code tree as described above.
It was observed that ‘freedom’ was a reoccurring theme and growing code. Therefore a couple of questions were added to the interviews about what informants meant with freedom. Then, it was observed that ‘equality’ was a growing code. After the transcriptions were closely re-read and the field notes were studied, it became clear that informants compared ‘lifestyle’ in Europe to Ukrainian lifestyle. Subsequently, informants discussed that Ukrainian people did not have as much freedom in their lifestyle as Europeans did. Informants connected that with an increasingly different mentality which was based on a set of European norms and values.
The same norms and values were used to explain the bridge between the lifestyle differences which informants talk about between Europe and the life they lived in the Netherlands compared to Ukraine. The set of norms and values – freedom, equality, respect for the law, and democracy – closed the gap between the mentality that informants frequently explained why Ukrainians were part of Europe.
Freedom, equality, respect of the law, and democracy were important to use in the description of the activities informants organized and attended; the posts they made on Facebook, and the topics they talked about. Even so, the norms and values were important in the description and understanding of the (re)construction mechanisms of the imaginative geographies.
These norms and values were identified as the core of how informants categorized the three imaginative geographies. Furthermore, the same norms and values were labeled by informants as the motivation behind EuroMaidan in Ukraine and the political, economic and social development that Ukraine went through.

Chapter 5. Ukrainian diaspora activists imagining 'The Netherlands'

"I am proud to call myself an activist."

"I find it such a stupid question 'whether I am an activist' - sorry, but, of course, I am!"

"I have deep respect for the Dutch people, Dutch culture and the Dutch way of life."

"[The Netherlands] is where I come home, after a holiday."

"It is here that I have work, where I have friends, where I do my groceries. I guess that makes Holland at least the country where I live. If I call it home? Maybe not so much, I don't feel like I belong here. Personally, I do not feel a deep emotional connection to this country, to this territory. I do not say; this could not grow. I enjoy my life here."

Ukrainian diaspora organized themselves in grassroots foundations in the Netherlands to "formally engage" in transnational economic and political activities (Portes, 2001 & 2003).
Their reasons to live in the Netherlands varied: most informants made the move to the Netherlands because of romantic relationships, others have found a job in the Netherlands, and a small group of the community studied at a Dutch university or college. All of them have in common that they (learn to) speak the Dutch language, and they follow the Dutch political debate.
These links they have with their country of residence illustrate the loosening of fixed links and borders with their country of origin (Newman & Paasi, 1998; Della Porta et al., 2006). Informants took on civic participation, and more specifically civic activism, in their country of residence (Preston et al., 2006; Ehrkamp, 2006).
That imagination is not a singular top-down practice, but also is done 'from below' will be illustrated by taking a detailed look at the diasporas' civic participation (Chakrabarty, 2000:148). In doing so, the (re)construction of their imaginative geography of 'the Netherlands' was investigated.
Imaginative geographies are constructed based on online and offline representations (symbols and images and narratives) and online and offline practices/performances (demonstrations and public activities). The construction mechanisms are expressed in civic participation, which is commonly researched in the country of origin (Preston et al., 2006:1634). This chapter, though, will focus on the country of residence, since this is where the diaspora involved in civic participation.

This chapter will discuss the used representations that informants associated with 'the Netherlands,' and the narratives behind the symbols and pictures. Subsequently, the narrative about the referendum will zoom in on how informants imagined the Netherlands. Through categorization of a set of characteristics of 'us' is set off against characteristics of 'them' (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Beech, 2014). These characteristics at the core of the imaginative geographies are norms and values

(Vanderbeck, 2006). Informants illustrated they way they categorized a set of foundational norms and values as ‘the Netherlands’ and ‘Ukraine.’

Lastly, the narrative behind the practices and performances of ‘the Netherlands’ will be discussed. Specifically, the performances which had to do with the commemoration of the victims of the MH17 will show the relation between the transnational position and sense of belonging to their country of residence.

Imaginative geographies play a constitutive role in the creation of a sense of belonging. According to Bloemraad (2000), an increase in civic participation corresponds with an increase in the sense of belonging to the country of residence.

The objective of this chapter, however, is to show that the informants’ narratives about the referendum and the plane crash of the MH17, expressed a friction in their sense of belonging to the Netherlands.

5.1. Representations

Interestingly, Ukrainian diaspora activists rarely used the Dutch national flag or national colors (red, white and blue) during offline activities and demonstration or in pictures on Facebook.

For the researcher, this raised the question whether or not informants experienced a sense of belonging to the Netherlands. Informants responded with surprise to the observation because it was obvious to them that they felt comfortable in the Dutch society. For that reason, they did not see it necessary to use Dutch symbols.

Nevertheless, a rare picture which displayed a Dutch flag was posted on both the website of ‘Ukrainians in the Netherlands’ (figure 3).

Figure 3

Informant O. replied in an interview:

"But we are in the Netherlands, right?! But we have a little Ukrainian flag. So we have a lot of the Netherlands and a whiff of Ukrainian. So we truly belong here. We just grew together with the Netherlands[8]."

This quotation illustrates that one informant felt rooted in her country of origin and country of residence. Informant V. said that the rootedness is the reason why the diaspora foundation used a banner with both Ukraine and the Netherlands depicted in their national colors with the text "Home is where my heart is."

Figure 4

"Ask anyone here: where are you from? And the first reaction of people is: do you mean Ukraine or do you mean in the Netherlands? In Ukraine or the Netherlands? And that was for us something like: this is the standard reply people from here give if you ask them: where are you from. Yes, indeed, it is your home where your heart is. And I said: yes, the Netherlands is my home base.[9]"

[8] Original text: "Maar we zijn toch ook in Nederland?! Maar we hebben hier een Oekraïense vlagje. Dus het is heel veel Nederland, met een vleugje Oekraïens. Dat we er ook gewoon bijhoren. We zijn gewoon vergroeit met Nederland."

[9] Original text: "Vraag maar aan iemand hier: waar kom je vandaan? En de eerste reactie van mensen is: bedoel je uit Oekraïne of bedoel je in Nederland? In Oekraïne of in Nederland? En dat was voor ons zoiets: dit is de

5.2. The narrative behind representations

Informants that lived in the Netherlands for over a decade described themselves as rooted in the Netherlands. They spoke the Dutch language fluently:

> ***"People are always surprised when they figure out I am not from here."***

Informant I. was confident in her knowledge about her knowledge about the Netherlands:

> ***"I can tell you anything about all the different holidays and traditions here. Ask me anything about this country and its people, and I can tell you about it.[10]"***

Informant Z. about her hometown:

> ***"I am proud of my city![11]"***

The usage of "their hearts belong here," (figure 4) and the comfort most informants expressed when describing their feelings about their lives in the Netherlands shows a sense of an emotional link to their country of residence.
It is true that the strength of this connection and the rootedness of these emotions differ per individual.

The online images and representations illustrate that a sense of belonging can be expressed in various forms, not necessarily in civic participation. In other words, sole observation of the public political involvement is not sufficient to claim an increase in a sense of belonging to the country of residence. Instead, it is only possible to argue that diaspora experienced a sense of belonging to their country of residence with a combination of observation of online written texts, pictures and symbols and closely analyzed personal narratives.
Since there were rarely any Dutch national flags or national colors present in the way informant expressed their links to the Netherlands, it did not mean that Ukrainian activists did not have political and emotional links to the Netherlands. Other than a visual way, these links can still be experienced and expressed. Therefore, when the imaginative geography at hand is not in need of protection, transformation, contestation by the subject which does the imagination, there is no need to support the (re)construction of the imaginative geography with visuals.

5.2.1. The narrative of foundational norms and values

A narrative appeared behind the reassurance of informants over their sense of belonging to the Netherlands and their repeated expression of feeling comfortable living in the Netherlands. The narrative about foundational norms and values went to the core of their imaginative geography of 'the Netherlands'.

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standaard reactie die mensen hier geven als je hem vraagt: waar kom je vandaan. Ja, inderdaad, het is je huis is waar je hart ligt. En ik zei: ja Nederland is mijn thuis basis."

[10] Original quotation: "Ik kan je alles vertellen over de verschillende feestdagen en tradities. Vraag me iets over dit land en de mensen hier, en ik kan je er over vertellen."

[11] Original quotation: "Ik ben trots op mijn stad!"

When informants and the researcher met for the first time, one of the first discussed topics was their reason to move to the Netherlands and their feeling of belonging to the Netherlands. According to Ukrainian diaspora activists, both the quality of the lifestyle in the Netherlands and the way people in the Netherlands organized their lives and, were reflected in the way the public services were organized in the Netherlands. For example, social advertisement (such as not drink driving), well planned public transport, well-maintained roads, public benefits, the pension system, and civilian trust in the political system.

Informants said that what is at the core important in life to Dutch people shines through in the quality of the public service. This mentality rests on a set of foundational norms and values: freedom, equality, non-corrupt, paying tax, respect for the law and democracy.

Here, freedom should be interpreted in the broadest way possible, to name a few examples: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom to love, and freedom of mobility. In addition, everybody in the Netherlands enjoyed this freedom.

This description of freedom, observed and formulated by informants, illustrated how they see that freedom gets priority in shaping the everyday life in the Netherlands.

Informant D. illustrated this in light of equality and connected it to freedom. She said that even when somebody temporarily does not have a job, he or she will get an allowance to feed her- or himself. Such a social service does not exist in Ukraine, and therefore not everybody is equal in Ukraine. Financial benefits enable somebody to be still equal human being and not be left out of the society. This way equality was labeled as another foundational value of the Dutch society.

Informants felt that democracy was the third principle of the Dutch society. Ukrainian activists admired the well functioning political system and the trust that Dutch people had in their politicians. Furthermore, informants felt that it was possible to have an open and public debate about political topics in the Netherlands. Informants perceived the trust and confidence that native Dutch citizens have in their government as inspiring for the political journey their country of origin is going through. Informants did not trust the Ukrainian government and Ukrainian politicians, where they saw that in the Netherlands people trusted their politicians. Informants believed that this trust in the political system derived from the representative democracy in the Netherlands.

Another two values that informants added were equality and respect for the law. Several informants explained it in the following line of thinking: corruption would not be tolerated whether it was done by Senate politicians or police officers. Regardless of the political and societal position of a person who committed corruption, he or she received an equal punishment in the Netherlands.

The last foundational norm/value was non-corrupt. Informants felt that people did not want corruption on any level in the Dutch society. The non-corrupt mentality is reflected in the illegality and intolerance of corruption. Everyone pays taxes for the social services, such as healthcare, prisons, and educational institutions to be accessible and running according to national and international standards.

To summarize, according to informants, the lifestyle in the Netherlands was based on a mentality of foundational norms and values of freedom, equality, non-corrupt, paying tax, respect for the law and democracy. Informants categorized this set of norms and values as the foundations of ‘the Netherlands.’ This lifestyle and the underlying norms and values were contrasted to the lifestyle in their country of origin.

It becomes visible that the (re)construction of imaginative geographies is not always the creation of *un*known space, such as Said (1978: 55) argued. Namely, informants had different links to their country of residence. Nonetheless, in the categorization of 'the foundational norms and values of the Netherlands' compared to 'the misfit of those norms and values to Ukraine' informants have an understanding of belonging to the foundational norms and values, as they feel comfortable with the foundational norms and values of the Netherlands.

5.3. Representations during the referendum

On- and offline representations were spread during the period leading up to the referendum.
An online blog was written with, according to the author, the objective to explain to Dutch population the relevance of the Association Agreement to the Ukrainian people.
The introduction of the blog:

> ***"Today, the 6th of April 2016, there will be an advisory referendum in the Netherlands about my home country Ukraine, more specifically about the question whether the Netherlands will – or will not – ratify the Association Agreement (AA) between Ukraine and EU. As a Ukrainian student who came to the Netherlands some months ago, I would like to tell you my opinion on this issue. It might be of some help to you."***

Flyers (figure 5) were distributed offline:

Figure 5[12]

[12] Translation of the text on the flyer: "Take this seriously! Your vote influences 45 million people. Vote 'for' on April 6: - Chances for entrepreneurs; – An extra trade partner; – Strong democracy; – Good for both countries"

"If you want to speculate about the significance of the color orange here, I have to disappoint you. It's orange because of the national color of the Netherlands, right? If we were able to spark some patriotism in the Dutch people than it had to be with the color orange."

Visual symbols were the least frequently used mode by which informants illustrated their imaginative geography of the Netherlands. That symbols about the Netherlands are less used than other parts of the (re)construction mechanisms of imaginative geographies can be linked to the fact it is the country of residence was not at the heart of the objective of the civic participation. Instead, the imaginative geography of 'the Netherlands' became more vivid in narratives behind the representations.

5.4. The narratives behind the representations

In the narrative of activism, informants explained the reasons they called themselves activists. Informant V. characterized herself on a social media profile under her identity description as an activist. She explained that she wanted to change the mentality and awareness of Dutch people about the situation in Ukraine and the Ukrainian people.

It goes to show that she was not alone in this, as more informants used the word 'activist' and 'activism' to describe themselves and what they did for the Ukrainian community. It illustrates that this group of people was aware of their active political involvement, and the amount of time and energy they put into it. More importantly, they had objectives with the political involvement. And they understood, that their societal position differed from other people in the country of residence and that their interpretation of the content of the (inter)national socio-political discourse was relevant for a broader audience for different reasons which will be discussed in the next chapters.

It needs to be noted that the Netherlands is the country of residence and the country wherein informants were civically active. Civic participation did not diminish a potential sense of belonging to the country of residence (Bloemraad, 2000), as activist work is not directed to defend their right to live in the Netherlands. Neither to practice the culture of their country of origin nor to have social, political or economic links to Ukraine. According to informants, the socio-political context of the referendum was not criticizing or diminishing the righteousness of Ukrainian diaspora to live in the Netherlands. Therefore, they do not feel personally attacked for living in the Netherlands. Though the socio-political discourse was about their country of origin, informants said that it was not portrayed righteously.

Since informants did not feel criticized or diminished in their position as Ukrainians in the Netherlands at the time of the referendum, there was no imminent power struggle over the position of the Ukrainian diaspora in the Netherlands. According to Said (1985), a (transnational) power relation or struggle translates into the categorizations of 'us' and 'them'. Since the informants did not perceive a power struggle, they did not categorize themselves different from other people in the Netherlands.

This signals two intertwined key points about the (re)construction of imaginative geographies from a bottom-up perspective. First**,** it illustrates that the (re)construction of imaginative geographies is a process wherein the imagination and social reality do not match. Any imagined aspect needs to twist,

pull, push, or create any form of friction with the social reality. Second, the societal position where from the imagining takes place needs to experience this friction at the moment of research, to reflect and explain the (re)construction to a researcher.
For informants, these two points collided into the friction in feeling comfortable living in the Netherlands.

The narrative of the referendum shows that the civic participation challenged the sense of belonging to the Netherlands. This result goes against the statement of Bloemraad (2000, in Preston et al., 2006:1634) about the increase in civic participation goes together with an increase in the sense of belonging to the country of residence.
According to informants, they experienced friction in their sense of belonging to their country of residence. In case one wants to speculate about a fluctuation of their sense of belonging, it can be argued that it changed in a 'negative' way since informants expressed less comfortable living in the Netherlands during the referendum. However, informants said it did not take away from their emotional link to the Netherlands.
The insight that the informants' narrative behind the referendum was a nuance on the relation between civic participation and a sense of belonging. Namely, an increase in the sense of belonging to the country of residence is dependent on the socio-political context wherein the civic participation takes place.

5.5. Practices and performances

The practice/performance wherein Ukrainian activists performed behavior related to 'the Netherlands,' was an activity which was triggered by a sudden change in socio-political context. This change made both the transnational position and the sense of belonging to the Netherlands clear. This activity concerned the plane crash of the MH17, which will be dealt with in the next paragraph. A detailed description and analysis of the practices and performances regarding the imaginative geography of Ukraine will be discussed in the following chapter.

5.5.1. MH17

Figure 6

A majority of the passengers on the plane had lived in the Netherlands. The crash of the MH17 can be labeled as a shocking nationwide event, as many Dutch citizens knew via their social networks a victim in the plane.
The MH17 airplane crash was for all informants a deeply painful memory. Some informants were moved to tears when talking about the memories of the time of the plane crash. Many informants shared pictures of half-mast Dutch flags or Dutch flags with a black frame which they posted in the days after the MH17 got shot down (figure 6). Informants described feelings of disbelieving, pain and condolence when describing these pictures during interviews.
That the crash happened in Ukraine was one reason why it was painful. Informants stressed that it was a shocking event for them and they saw that it had a deep impact in the Dutch society.
To show their feelings of condolence to Dutch people and the surviving relatives of the victims, some Ukrainian diaspora activists organized a commemoration activity at Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam. This activity was the only performance which illustrated the emotional links informants had with the Netherlands. A couple of organizers of the activity were part informants of this research. They said that they knew this was not an appropriate time for a political activity to ask attention for the impact of the plane crash on the political situation in Ukraine because they felt the pain and hurt people experienced in their country of residence.

> ***"I wanted to stand still, be quiet. And show support that also a Ukrainian in the Netherlands was with my thoughts and prayers with families and friends of the victims and show my respect.[13]"***

> ***"I wanted to support Dutch people. Again, I am almost crying. It was such a fierce moment. […] I also live in the Netherlands and I love Dutch people and I love Ukrainian people. I love the whole world, but I do not know the whole world. But I do know Dutch people and I do know Ukrainians. It came so close. It was so bizarre that Dutch people have died in Ukraine.[14]"***

The willingness to voluntarily organize an activity at times of national disaster shows their involvement and feeling of belonging to the Dutch society. In other words, it displayed their emotional links to the Netherlands run deeper than only having a life in the Netherlands.
The performance after the plane crash of the MH17 depicts first of all the transnational position of the informants. They felt the emotional impact as society member of the Netherlands and Ukraine.
Also, informants manifested their sense of belonging to both the Netherlands and Ukraine in their civic participation by organizing a memorial. Furthermore, the commemoration activity showed informants

[13] Original text of the quotation: "Ik wilde stil staan, stil zijn. En laten zien dat ook een Oekraïner in Nederland was met mijn gedachten en gebeden met de families en vrienden van de slachtoffers en laat mijn medeleven tonen."
[14] Original text of the quotation, informant Y.: "Ik wilde Nederlanders steunen. Nu zit ik weer bijna te huilen. Dat was echt heftig moment. […] Ik leef ook in Nederland en ik houd van Nederlanders en ik houd van Oekraïners. Ik hou van de hele wereld, maar ik ken niet de hele wereld. Maar ik ken wel Nederlanders en ik ken wel Oekraïners. Het kwam echt zo dichtbij. Het was zo bizar dat Nederlanders in Oekraïne zijn omgekomen."

understood and supported the feelings of pain and sorrow which people in the Netherlands experienced.
The narratives and representations (such as in figure 6) which dealt with the commemoration activity of the victims of the MH17 plane crash reaffirmed that informants imagined the Netherlands as a place that they had emotional links to.

5.6. The essence of the Netherlands, according to informants

Informants used representations rarely in their on- and offline civic participation. Nonetheless, in the narratives behind the rare representations, it became clear that informants felt comfortable in the Netherlands and experienced (to various degrees) a sense of belonging to their country of residence.
Furthermore, from the narratives, it became clear informants imagined the Netherlands as a mentality which reflected in the high quality of lifestyle and well performing social services. The mentality of their country of residence rested on a set of foundational norms and values: freedom, equality, paying taxes, non-corrupt, respect for the law, and democracy.
Informants stated that the socio-political discourse did not focus on their transnational position in the Netherlands. Instead, informants felt that the discourse described an incorrect image about Ukraine. This created friction in the feeling of living comfortably in the Netherlands.
These combined notions show the incorrectness of Bloemraad (2000) his idea about the linear relation between civic participation and an increase in the sense of belonging to the country of residence. Namely, Ukrainian diaspora activists became civically active because of a friction in the sense of belonging to the Netherlands. Thus, not an increase in a sense of belonging. It was the referendum which made that informants took on an active civic role since the socio-political discourse made informants feel less comfortable in the Netherlands.

"I am a Dutch lady with a Ukrainian heart."[15]

[15] Informant P.

6. Ukrainian diaspora activists imagining 'Ukraine'

> ***"Currently I live in the Netherlands, but my heart and my soul are still in Ukraine it is in my home country."***
>
> ***"[I live with] one leg here and one leg there."***
>
> ***"It's the country that I love."***
>
> ***"Of course you live here, and therefore you have to adjust yourself and all, and you did change, but you do have that heart from Ukraine."***
>
> ***"Because Ukraine was, of course, a kind of 'terra incognita,' for most people in the Netherlands."***[16]
>
> ***"But I will always stay a Ukrainian; I can't express it differently."***

What it means to live a transnational life will be illustrated by Ukrainian diaspora activists in the Netherlands in this chapter. Even though informants lived in a country with which they experienced a (friction in the) sense of belonging, they said it was not a substitute for their country of origin. By looking at the civic participation in their country of residence, this chapter will focus on the imaginative geography of their country of origin.

They mentioned that Ukraine is where they grew up; a familiar country; where their understanding went beyond language and stretched to an emotional level; where the food is the tastiest; had childhood friends; where their families lived; and where they were independent to travel, since they spoke the language and knew their way around.

According to Holloway & Valentine (2000), and Beech (2014) the second feature of imaginative geographies, 'creation of identity,' consists out of two dichotomized categories. Half of the dichotomy, 'Ukraine,' is the reason the diaspora got publically involved in politics. Della Porta & Diani, (2006:47-49) pointed out that the reasons to do so are rooted in the private sphere. The private sphere turned out to be crucial to understand the (re)construction of the imaginative geography of 'Ukraine,' since the counter category, 'Russia,' was left out from the public sphere where the civic participation is expressed. For that reason, the objective of this chapter is, first of all, that to show the relevance of the inclusion of the private sphere in the (re)construction of imaginative geographies.

The second objective of this chapter is to show that informants imagined Ukraine as a country that went through a "modernization" in its mentality. Similar to the previous chapter, the Ukrainian mentality is labeled with norms and values, which are at the core of imaginative geographies (Vanderbeck, 2006).

To understand the (re)construction of the imaginative geography of Ukraine, this chapter will start with the depiction of the online representations. Followed by the narratives behind these images and

[16] Informant I. Original quotation: "Want Oekraïne was natuurlijk een soort van terra incognita, voor de meeste mensen in Nederland."

symbols. Continued by a description of the practices and performance regarding Ukraine. Lastly, the narratives of EuroMaidan and the referendum in the Netherlands will be featured to understand the narratives behind the practices and performances.

6.1. Representations of patriotism

Common symbols and representations which informants labeled as 'Ukraine' or 'Ukrainian' were the national flags, the *vyshyvanka*[17], flowers and various types of eatables. A selection can be found below in figure 7 to 13.

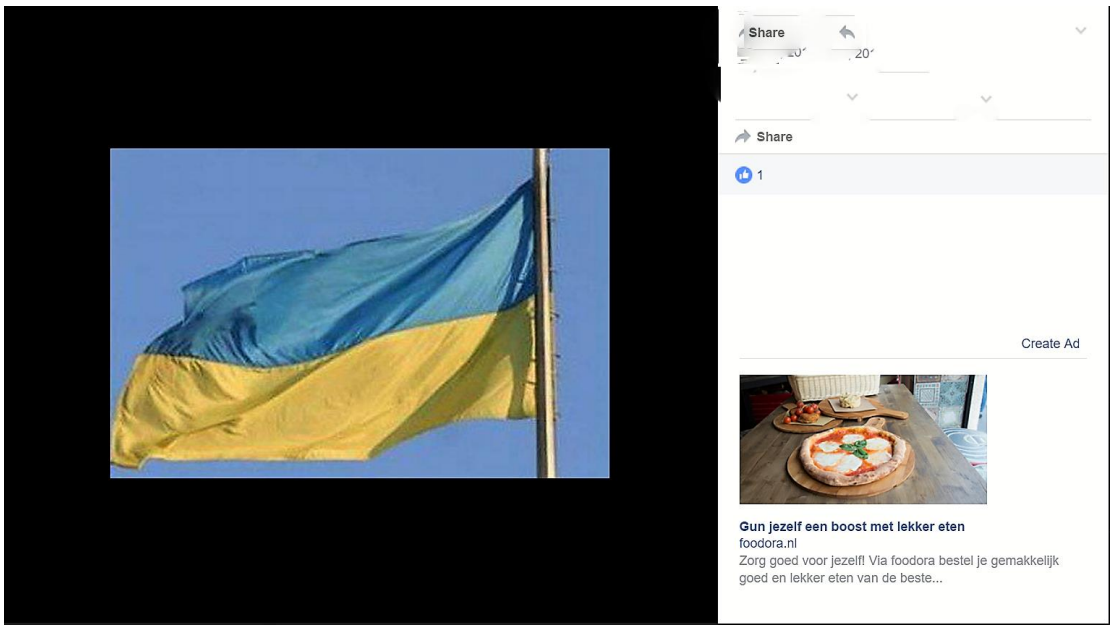

Figure 7

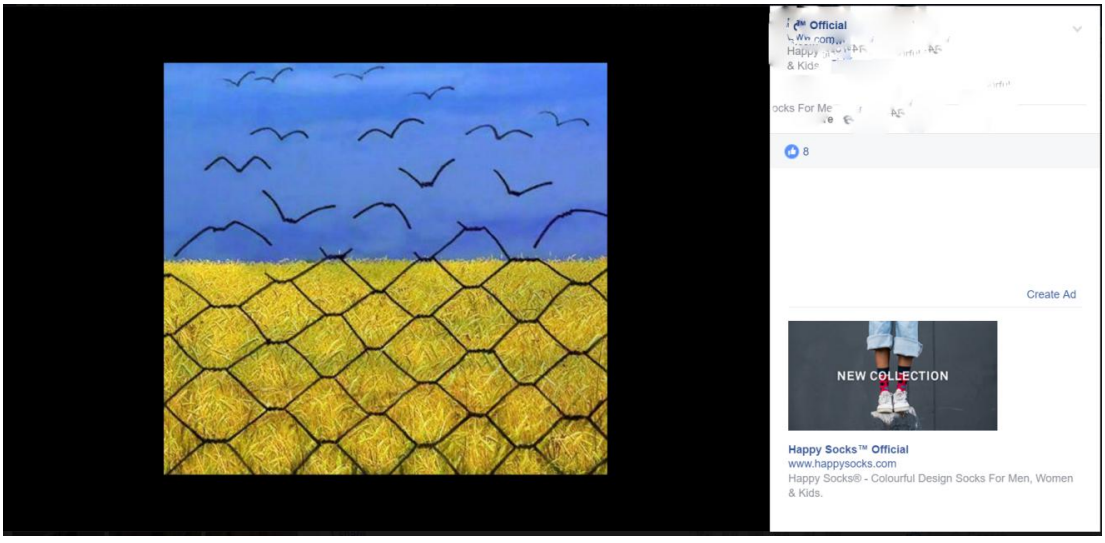

Figure 8

[17] Traditionally a white blouse embroiled with colorful patterns. Informants wore contemporary versions of the *vyshyvanka* in figure 9 and 10.

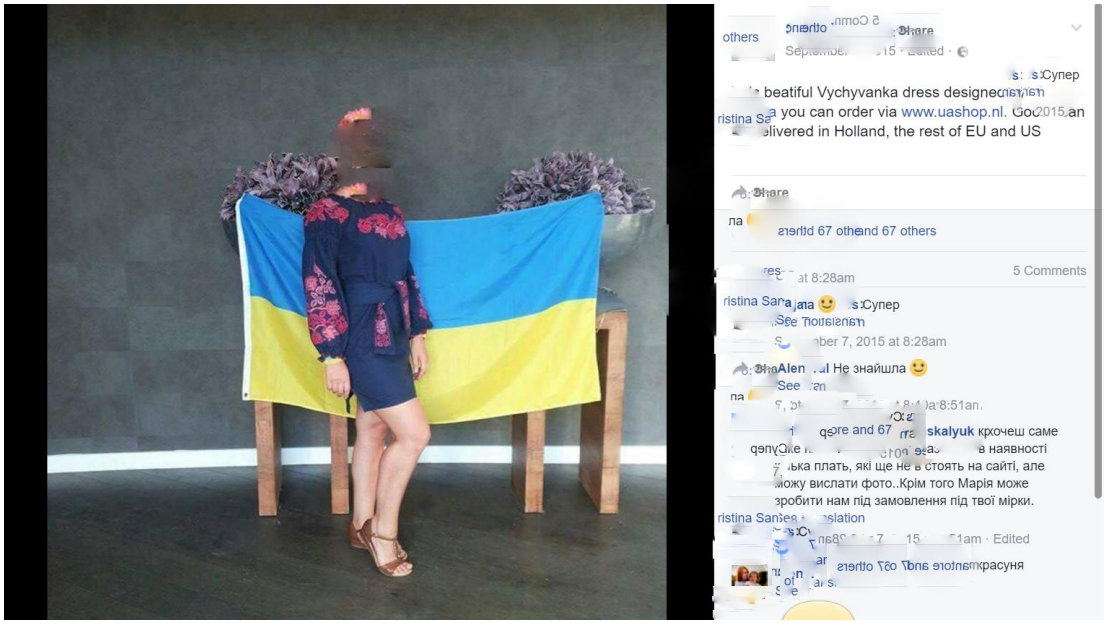

Figure 9

Figure 10

Figure 11

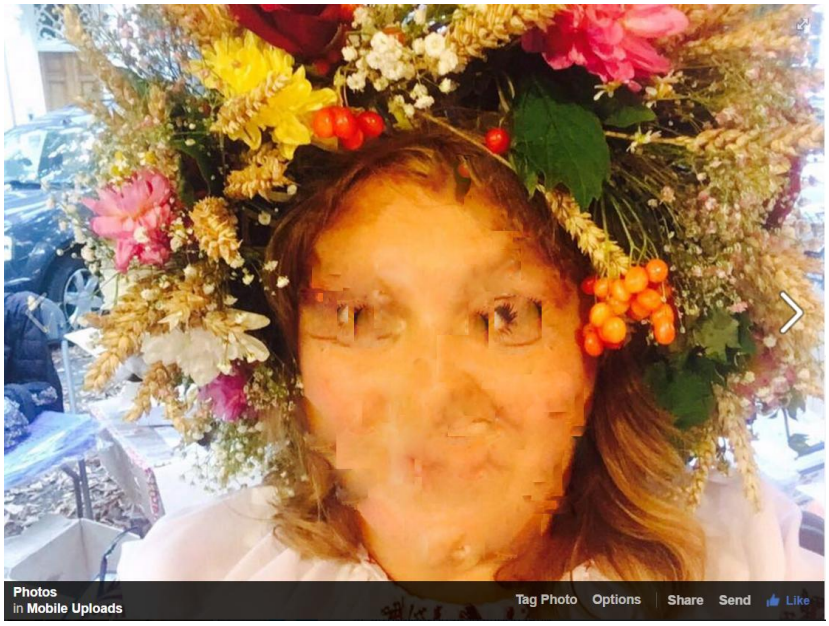

Figure 12

Figure 13

6.2. Narratives behind the representations

Pictures of sunflowers, red berries, grain, were common on personal and foundations' Facebook pages (figures 11, 12 and 13). These were pictures which resembled informants' memories of Ukraine. When they were sick, their parents made them tea of red berries to get better. And when they traveled through their birth country they saw fields of sunflowers and grain. Also, informants repeatedly said that the soil of Ukraine is highly fertile, which resulted in a massive agriculture. According to Ukrainian activists, two of the biggest export products were sunflower oil and grain (flower). "Dutch people should be aware that their fried potatoes are a Ukrainian product.[18]"

Informants frequently posted online pictures of a field of yellow grain under a blue sky (figure 8). They explained this resembled "real life flags" as those sights translated into the official national flag (figures 7, 8, and 9). A lot of online pictures depicted the national flag, and it was also used of "(of course) during (offline) activities. We are patriots, and we want to show the world that Ukraine is in the house![19]"

Furthermore, online pictures of informants wearing (often white) embroidered blouses and articles about 'international *vyshyvanka* day,' (figure 10) were posted on Facebook. Also, online articles about famous people (e.g. the Dutch queen) wearing these blouses, and about the popularity of these Ukrainian blouses in fashion in the summer of 2016 were circulating on social media platforms.

Since the *vyshyvanka* is the traditional Ukrainian clothing, Ukrainian diaspora members wore the blouses at activities.

The articles were shared to make non-Ukrainian blouse-wearers aware that their blouses which they bought at shops such as H&M, Pull & Bear, and Zara, were not just a fashionable trend, but also a

[18] Informant U.
[19] Informant Y.

Ukrainian cultural product. "I know that Russians will say that the *vyshyvanka* and *borscht*[20] are Russian, but they are completely wrong, and they know it. They just claim it's theirs, so it is not Ukrainian. That is bull shit![21]"

The Ukrainian diaspora foundation in the Netherlands 'Brand New Ukraine' launched an online promotion project about 25 reasons to be proud of Ukraine (figure 11). The project started initially since there were countless reasons for Ukrainians to take pride in being Ukrainian. This project had the main objective to remind Ukrainians of a couple of these reasons. Secondly, non-Ukrainian "should know all the wonderful and great things that Ukraine and its people have in store for the world." The initiators of the project named the well developed IT sector of Ukraine as the first reason to be proud of Ukraine. Other informants added that the IT sector illustrated the modern and dynamic way of Ukrainian lifestyle, just like in the Netherlands and other Western countries.
The sunflower decoration of the online image referred to one of the 25 reasons: the Ukrainian production of sunflower oil.

Informants used the word 'proud' frequently to describe themselves. Informants A. and Ok. explained that being a patriot goes together with being proud of your country.

> ***Informant Z.: And then Ukraine was occupied for nine hundred years, first by Mongolians, then by Polish, then by Russians, then the Soviet Union. And now finally Ukraine became independent. Because nine hundred years Ukrainians were told they don't exist. So I also think why we are so proud. Why are we screaming that we are Ukrainians? Because we do exist, our people, look, I am here. And am not Chinese, I am not Brazilian, I am not Russian, I am not German, I am Ukrainian, and I belong to here, and the Ukrainian language does exist. So whenever somebody wins a big contest or competition if it is Olympic Games or Eurovision, finally they will read Ukraine. Another point here, this country exist.***

These representations displayed the patriotism of informants regarding their sense of belonging to their country of origin. With these online representations and offline symbols informants had the objective to display their love for Ukraine and display their memories to their country of origin.
The way informants imagined Ukraine will be looked at in more detail with the upcoming representations which were used during offline practices and performances during EuroMaidan and the referendum.

6.3. Practices and performances

Informants organized and attended various demonstrations over the time from EuroMaidan (figure 14) and one demonstration in the time leading up to the referendum (figure 15).

[20] A dish of red beet soup.
[21] Informant T.

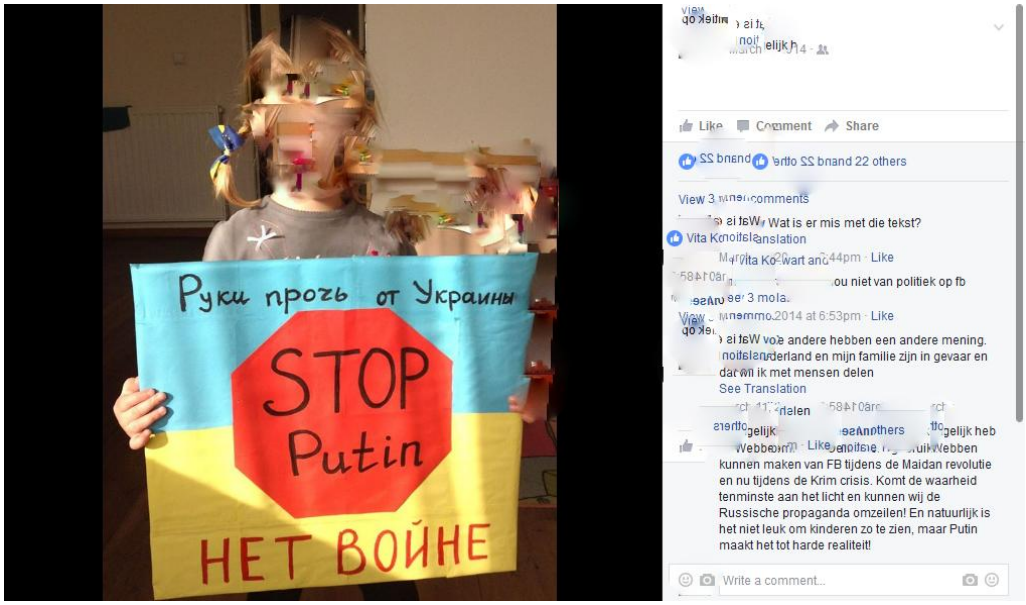

Figure 14

Figure 15

Furthermore, informants organized and attended various activities, such as a movie tour through the Netherlands. Documentaries were shown about the EuroMaidan movement, the post-EuroMaidan situation, and the current situation in Ukraine. Also, a library tour was held with speakers who published books about Ukraine and would talk about their books and their opinion about the current situation in

Ukraine. Among others, Fleur de Weerd (author of "Het land dat maar niet wil lukken"), Ruud Meij (author of "Lviv, stad van paradoxen") and the author of "Grensland," Mark Jansen.
Another high profile activity was a political panel debate with politicians (among others Mark Rutte, Alexander Pechtold, and Kathalijne Buitenweg) and Ukrainian people living in the Netherlands.
All the documentary makers, authors, and panel members were contacted by using the Ukrainian community network. Informants were enthusiastic about all kinds of positive achievements by Ukrainian people. Informants were aware of their patriotic behavior, as some informants told the researcher from time to time that they understood in case she got tired of their "proud and patriotic ravings."
Another practices and performances were cultural parties. During cultural parties, a traditional Ukrainian celebration would receive a contemporary twist with the usage of a Ukrainian DJ, and (Ukrainian) finger food.

6.4. Narratives behind the practices and performances

6.4.1. The narrative of diaspora foundations

According to informants, the Ukrainian diaspora foundations were the organizational driving force behind almost all activities, parties and demonstrations. The organizers of the political activities stressed the importance that they did not organize demonstrations which contained a message against Russia. This is relevant to keep in mind when Ukrainian diaspora explained the philosophy of the foundations:
One Ukrainian diaspora foundation mentioned to have as an objective to "promote a positive image of Ukraine in the Netherlands. [22]" Despite that, another Ukrainian diaspora foundation did not mention the word 'promotion' in the mission statement, but the initiators of the second foundation used the word 'promotion' in the description of its objective. A third foundation stated that it wanted to "promote Ukraine in Europe."

Ukrainian diaspora members and its activists alike clarified that promotion is needed, because of the bad image that Ukraine had in the public eye, for example in the international news. Informants expressed that the bad image of Ukraine which was commonly discussed in the dominant media, foreign and international political consisted of negative aspects. But informants felt for their country of origin and therefore knew that there was more to Ukraine than those negative aspects.
Ukrainian diaspora activists promoted positive aspects with the objective to create a holistic picture of Ukraine. Nonetheless, informants acknowledged the commonly discussed corruption. And they discussed the war in eastern Ukraine. Informants underlined the misinformation in the international media and politics about the usage of the term 'civil war' to refer to this war.

> ***"The positive side of Ukraine, because of course, you can about everything in the world, about each country you can say positive and negative sides. And of course you want positive [for your country]. In general, I share positive messages on Facebook. There is already enough negative news that you can find on the internet about Ukraine and everywhere in the news. But there are happening a***

[22] Foundation "Oekraïners in Nederland," under 'long term objectives' from https://www.maidan.nl/nl/ua-in-nl/

lot of positive things over there, and that is not always in the picture. Including how I see Ukraine right now.[23]"

Here it becomes clear that informants contested the labels of the political elite. They negotiated these 'negative' labels of corruption and war with 'positive' labels of patriotism of, for example, *vyshyvanka*, *borscht*, flowers, and IT sector.

Positive aspects were set off against the aspects which were discussed in the news. Informant W. explained that the moment one of the Ukrainian diaspora foundations in the Netherlands was set up, she checked the positive aspects she had in mind to use for promotion with a Russian friend to decide which positive aspects were going to be used for promotion work in the Netherlands. Informant W. reasoned that a Russian friend was capable of seeing what is Russian and therefore knows what is not Ukrainian and vice versa.

The latter hints towards two points in the categorization of 'Ukraine.' Firstly, it illustrates the way the characteristic labels that informants imagined as 'Ukraine' encompassed more than Ukrainian politics. Secondly, 'Ukraine' captured all the characteristics which informants labeled on the imaginative geography of 'Ukraine', set off against the characteristics that were categorized as 'Russia.' The dichotomization of 'Russia' and 'Ukraine' in the construction of Ukraine as an imaginative geography became more evident when informants spoke about EuroMaidan.

6.4.2. The narrative of EuroMaidan

"But really, I became active for real after that revolution. Or during that revolution. Maidan, so the end 2013 beginning 2014.[24]"

All informants noted that EuroMaidan was the first time Ukrainian diaspora in the Netherlands came together. The first gatherings were sister demonstrations of EuroMaidan in Amsterdam. The vast majority of the informants meet their first fellow Ukrainian diaspora members when they already lived in the Netherlands, as they did not know any Ukrainians in the Netherlands before EuroMaidan. The demonstrations were organized to support the cause of the demonstration in Kiev. Also, informants went to the demonstrations to seek support from fellow Ukrainians, because it was an emotional and painful period. Non-Ukrainians did not understand what the informants were going through.

[23] Original quotation: "De positieve kant van Oekraïne, want je kan natuurlijk over alles in de wereld, over elk land kan je positieve en negatieve kanten zeggen. En natuurlijk wil je positieve. Ik deel over het algemeen positieve berichten op Facebook. Er is al genoeg negatief nieuws te vinden op internet over Oekraïne en overall in het nieuws. Maar er gebeurd ook veel aan positieve dingen daar, en dat is niet altijd in beeld. Daarbij zit ook hoe ik Oekraïne tegenwoordig zie."

[24] Informant N. Original quotation: "Maar echt ik ben echt actief geworden nadat na die revolutie. Of tijdens die revolutie. Maidan, dus eind 2013 begin 2014."

Informants perceived the end of EuroMaidan as a breakthrough since a new government was formed. Other than the previous government, the new one signed the Association Agreement instead of keeping a close political relationship with Russia. Despite that result, informants said that they do not trust the new government. The informants felt the lack of trust was the reason to keep putting pressure on the government to fulfill the EU set conditions under which the Association Agreement was signed.
Informant E. spoke about the song that he had written and performed during a demonstration in front of the Russian Embassy:

> ***Informant E.: "My intention was, and people are free to interpret the song however they like. But my intention that I put in the words is that the Russians flags are waving proudly stained in blood. Proudly, because that reflects the kind of information that was being spread in Russia that, well, well, "the Russian state is helping the rebels who are fighting the Ukrainian fascists. [] And this is such a proud thing, that we are helping a good cause". So flags are waving proudly, stained in blood. Stained in the blood of war. Basically, I am saying that Russia is stained in blood. That Russian hands are stained in blood."***

During several demonstrations during EuroMaidan against the war in Eastern Ukraine banners, badges and posters were displayed with the message to draw attention to the problem of Russia's continuing violent influence on Ukraine. With texts such as "Russia out," "Stop Putin."
With practices and performances such as demonstrations, and during those performances - symbols were used to vocalize the Ukrainian activists' their opinion about Russia (e.g. figure 14).

'Russia' kept coming back in all aspects that informants did not associate with Ukraine. In several narratives - which together make up the narrative of EuroMaidan, this dichotomization was discussed in more detail.
One of the reoccurring narratives was the Russian propaganda about Ukraine, in particular about armed conflict in eastern Ukraine.
Several informants said that Russian propaganda did not frame the war in eastern Ukraine as a Russian initiated war. Instead, it is explained as that Russia helped pro-Russian rebels to liberate themselves from Ukrainian oppression. Informants knew from a first or second-hand experience that the war was started by Russia.

> ***T.: […] Politicians and journalists who were raving out nonsense, which were completely not true.***
>
> ***Interviewer: What kind of nonsense?***
>
> ***T.: Well, that, for example, the story was that the war in the east of Ukraine is a civil war. The definition of civil war is that it's between its people that something happens about a certain topic that the people are fighting each other. Well, that is not the case. This is a war between two countries. This is Russia fighting with***

> ***Ukraine. My parents have seen it with their own eyes. And they were in conversation with people there themselves. Also with the people who walked with rivals on the street. Also, my mother had a calm conversation with those people: what do you do here? Why do you come here in my city to impose your rules? And those were Russians. Who openly told: we are here just for work. We are, we are getting paid for this. Some people were from Chechnya. Also in hired, they were just mercenaries.***[25]

Informants framed the Russian propaganda as a tool to increase the last political influence on Ukraine after it got its independence. By starting a war, and annex Crimea, Russia tried to undermine Ukraine its authority and integrity. By now the annexation is framed as illegal by the international community, to the discretion of informants.
Numerous people in the Ukrainian community stated that Russian media sources were known in Ukraine for the false and made up content with the objective to get Putin and his political circle influence over Ukraine, at the cost of anything and anybody.
Informant I. gave the example that during a Dutch talk show they used a clip of a lady who claimed to be Ukrainian and said that the Ukrainian army was fighting its people. I. explained that the clip came from Russian state media.

Another repeated narrative was about the Russian geopolitical long-lasting interest in Ukraine. The most frequently used reference to this history was the former Soviet period. Informants set off contemporary Ukraine against Ukraine at the times of the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, informants did not dismiss the fingerprint that those times left on the current state of affairs in Ukraine. For example, some informants stated that Ukraine is dependent on Russia for its gas and financial support, but that those dependencies will change in the near future. Furthermore, the well-known and deep-rooted corruption was inherited from the Soviet times. Back in the day, the elite enriched themselves over the lower class citizens. Where these days, the low-level corruption is explained as a tradition and helping each other financially out (the average salaries are still low).

[25] Original quotation: T.: Die onzin dan aan het uitkramen waren, die helemaal niet waar waren.

R.: Wat voor onzin?

T.: Nou dat het bijvoorbeeld dat het verhaal was: dat het een burgeroorlog is in het oosten van Oekraïne. Die definitie van burgeroorlog, is dat het tussen hetzelfde volk is dat daar iets gebeurd op een bepaald onderwerp dat het volk zelf tegen elkaar aan het vechten is. Nou, daar is geen enkel sprake van. Dit is een oorlog tussen twee landen. Dit is Rusland die vechten met Oekraïne. Mijn ouders hebben dat met hun eigen ogen gezien. En ze hebben zelf daar met mensen in gesprek geweest. Ook met die mensen die maar met geweren over straat lopen. Ook mijn moeder die is daar rustig in gesprek gegaan: wat komen jullie hier doen? Waarom komen jullie hier in mijn stad om hier jullie regels op te leggen? En dat waren Russen. Die hebben openlijk vertelt: wij zijn hier gewoon aan het werk. Wij worden, wij krijgen hier voor betaald. Er waren mensen uit Tsjetsjenië. Ook in gehuurd, het waren gewoon huurlingen eigenlijk.

It became clear that informants categorized 'Ukraine' versus 'Russia.' Or in other words, they dichotomized their country of origin by setting it off against characteristics which they associated with 'Russia.' The only label that both the category of 'Russia' and 'Ukraine' shared was corruption, which informants explained as a remain of the Soviet Union of which both categories made part of.

The information about the dichotomization of 'Ukraine' versus 'Russia' is communicated in demonstrations in the public sphere. Interestingly, however, informants did not want to associate the diaspora foundations with the demonstrations or online messages with any reference to Russia.

> ***Informant V.: We really have as a foundation, for us a policy made that we do not say anything negative about Russia. We promote Ukraine; we only release positively about Ukraine. But we don't publish or communicate anything anti[Russia].***[26]

Informants imagined Ukraine as an independent country, which was the reason to retained themselves from using any references to Russia in their public actions which came from the foundations.
Informants imagined Ukraine to be in a position where it was on a trajectory of change, which will be discussed in detail in the next paragraph. Informants felt that their country of origin could not expect a foreign country to consider to help Ukraine in its political reforms. They reasoned that with a negative connotation to the imaginative geography of 'Ukraine', foreign countries would be afraid that their support would go wasted to corruption and war.
Even though demonstrations were held with messages about Russia, most of the reoccurring narratives about the category of 'Russia' were held in a private setting. They did so because in a private setting they were able to talk beyond the Russian continuing (geo)political interest in Ukraine. Ukrainian diaspora activists talked about details of their troubles with Russia such as family troubles during the Soviet Union, corruption in daily life, false news because of Russian propaganda, politicians which were not persecuted, and the Russian influence on Ukrainian politicians (which they also saw after EuroMaidan with Yanukovych).

Therefore, the dichotomization became fully visible and comprehensible after analysis of conversations and interviews with informants. First of all, it shows that with a bottom-up perspective the dichotomization in the construction of imaginative geographies can consist out of a hidden and sensitive topic. In contrast to, a top-down perspective, since the construction is then deductible state policies. For that reason, field research combined with participant observation and interviews is needed to understand these hidden and sensitive categorizations.
The grounds on which informants made the dichotomy of 'Ukraine' and 'Russia' became clear with the narrative of the referendum.

[26] Original quotation: "We hebben echt als stichting voor ons beleid gemaakt dat wij niks negatiefs over Rusland zeggen. We promoten Oekraïne, we gaan alleen positief over Oekraïne uitlichten. Maar we gaan niks 'anti' publiceren of communiceren."

6.4.3. The narrative of the referendum

To understand the narrative about the referendum, it needs to be noted that the referendum was about the Association Agreement, which was, according to informants, one of the main reasons EuroMaidan started.

The interchangeable usage of "revolution" and "Maidan" between informants, provided an insight into the interpretation and significance that informants give to EuroMaidan. They framed EuroMaidan as a revolution which was the stepping stone of nationwide change.

> ***"Also after Maidan, and this is what my goal, how to contribute to the period after Maidan, yeah Maidan. It's to contribute the development of the country. Because Maidan was an initial movement, like a push, but it is not enough. It will stop if you don't support that movement.[27]"***

The words 'change' and 'modernization' were used to explain one another. Therefore, EuroMaidan was framed as the moment to change Ukraine, or, in other words, to make Ukraine modern.

According to informants, that change started in the hearts and minds of people. Or in other words, the change started in their mentalities. Informants said that this became clear when students started EuroMaidan and got acclamation of fellow society members when the demonstration grew in the number of people on the square. Despite the governmental authorized violation of human rights of the demonstrators by the police, the nationwide acclamation and growth of the demonstrations continued.

The cultural parties and political activities which were held in the months leading up to the referendum displayed this new and modern mentality. Recalling from the paragraph '7.3. Practices and Performance' the usage of music at cultural parties: informants posted the artists at these parties and some other Ukrainian artists on Facebook. These artists made various forms of electro music, but informants did not call themselves a fan of these artists. They were invited to play at cultural parties because informants considered the music style "modern." The music style fitted the popular norm of music in the country of residence, which is the reason why informants expected people in the country of residence to relate to the modern standards of music in Ukraine.

[27] Informant G.

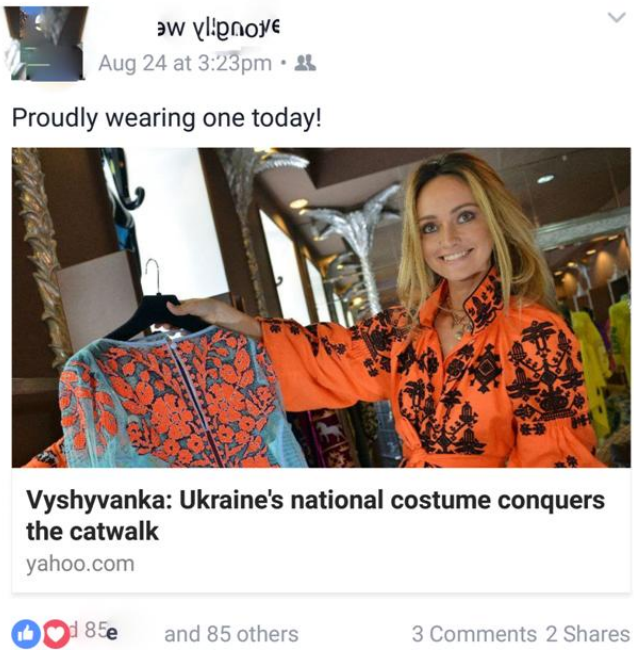

Figure 16

The same goes for the online and offline popularization of the *vyshyvanka* (figure 16). By sharing online articles about the blouse which was designed by big (sometimes Ukrainian) designers or clothing brands, informants display that Ukraine is hip, trendy and modern in their traditional clothing.
On offline social and political public activities, some informants wore a t-shirt with embroilments. Informant Ok. explained that these versions of the *vyshyvanka* showed that the blouses can be modern and did not necessarily had to be traditional, because "yes, Ukrainians are traditional, but we are also modern. We are a good mix!" The shift from a blouse to a t-shirt functioned as a reification of change in mentality in the national clothing.
The mentality change that informants promoted were labeled with a new set of norms and values. Furthermore, these norms and values are part of dichotomy against a Russian labeled mentality. These new norms and values were internalized by Ukrainians, but informants said that EuroMaidan was not for no reasons called *Euro*Maidan.

By listening to the narratives, it was discovered that the mentality change and the norms and values were behind the public activities of cultural parties, political activities, and demonstration. Two reasons explained the promotion of the change of norms and values. The first reason was rooted in the way informants imagined Ukrainian politicians. Namely, informants had distrust in the government, which is responsible for the continuing of the initial movement towards a new mentality. The second reason was to get that mentality change of the common people reflected in the governmental institutions.
Consequently, the category of 'Ukraine' of the dichotomization of 'Ukraine' and 'Russia,' split into a different dichotomization of 'Soviet Ukraine' and 'modern Ukraine.'
The category of 'Soviet Ukraine' consisted of labels that informants labeled as remnants of the Soviet Union. Those same labels were used for the category of 'Russia:' corruption on all levels, violations of

human rights. Also, a political system with no democracy, but authoritarian, olichargy, and a closed political circle, which was not open for change. Furthermore, no freedom, which came in different forms: no freedom of speech, no freedom of sexuality, no freedom of the press. Furthermore, no equality of genders, no equality of class, and no equality before the law.
The category of 'modern Ukraine' was labeled with counterparts of the category of 'Soviet Ukraine.' Namely, non-corrupt, paying taxes, respect for human rights, freedom, equality for all, respect for the law, equality before the law and democracy.

The above-discussed elements of the parties and activities resemble Ukrainian culture, lifestyle and a new mentality, which was how Ukrainian diaspora activists categorized their country of origin. To the notion that the lifestyle and mentality of Ukrainians changed inclines that informants saw a process with a starting point and a goal regarding the modernization.

> ***"I am a co-founder of an organization in [a European city[28]] which has a goal, set a goal to support existing reforms and introduce, based on the best practice what we see in Europe. Cause we live in [European country], or the Netherlands, in [European country[29]] we see what works, what was implemented in infrastructure, in politics, yeah, and it would also work in Ukraine. It is just not there.[30]"***

The starting point was the Soviet period, which was the moment of the Russian influence on Ukraine and Ukrainians began. This links to the categorization of 'Russia.' Informants othered themselves as 'modern Ukrainians' from 'Russians.' The latter were labeled as "stuck in the Soviet mentality." The 'modern' label referred to the political affiliation: Europe.
Here informants created a dichotomization of the Ukrainian political setting. It perceived Ukraine either as a country with characteristics of the former Soviet Union mentality: corrupt, no respect for human rights, no freedom, olichargy, authoritarian, and no equality. The second category is Ukraine as a modern, contemporary country with the opposite mentality: respect for human rights, freedom of speech, equality for all, respect for the law, and non-corrupt.
That second category has the new mentality that informants spoke about when they referred to the change of mentality. Interestingly, the characteristics of the second category are the same characteristics that informants referred to like the mentality of the country of origin – as described in the chapter about the Netherlands.

6.5. The essence of 'Ukraine,' according to informants

Informant Ok. summarized the essence in one sentence:

> ***"Ukrainians are just very Ukrainian."***

[28] Reformed to protect anonymity
[29] Reformed to protect anonymity
[30] Informant G.

Informants were self-proclaimed patriots of their country of origin. The patriotism was expressed in the numerous online pictures of Ukrainian characteristics (most commonly was the Ukrainian flag) and national milestones (e.g. winning of Eurovision Song Contest) on social media. An offline way of showing their Ukrainian background was wearing of the *vyshyvanka*.

The narrative behind these online representations illustrated that Ukraine was the country of origin of the Ukrainian diaspora activists, which was reflected in the expressed love for it and the way informants referred to the familiar lifestyle and emotional connection with Ukrainians.

Offline representations which were used during practices and performances generated narratives about EuroMaidan and the referendum.

With the intention to organize political activities and demonstrations during EuroMaidan, informants illustrated that characteristics such as war, annexation, corruption derive from the long history of the Soviet Union and Russian influence on Ukraine and Ukrainians. These characteristics were characterized as 'Russia,' which was made into a dichotomization with the category of 'Ukraine.'

Informants felt that the change and modernization that took place in Ukraine ever since EuroMaidan started, will continue to develop with the support of European countries including the Netherlands. Since the Netherlands held a referendum, informants organized cultural parties and political activities. In the details of narratives about music and clothing of these parties and activities, a pattern occurred wherein informants set of the category of 'modern Ukraine' against the category of 'Russia.' 'Modern Ukraine' held characteristics of a modern mentality with norms and values: freedom, freedom of speech, freedom to love, equality, equality before the law, respect for the law, respect for human rights and democracy.

Interestingly, these are the same norms and values which informants categorized as the 'Dutch mentality.'

Are these new norms and values Ukrainian, or do they come from somewhere else? Informants said that the answer to that question laid in the reason why the symbol of the European flags was used during EuroMaidan.

7. Ukrainian diaspora activists imagining 'Europe'

> ***"What I am getting at, is that you should forget about what is Ukraine and what is the Netherlands, the thing is, is that it all is Europe!"***

The Ukrainian diaspora activists dealt with a third imaginative geography as the socio-political debate around the referendum revolved around the Association Agreement between Ukraine and Europe. Namely, this chapter looks into the (re)construction of the imaginative geography of 'Europe.' The construction of the latter imaginative geography is dominated by the political elite (Stephens, 2011:255; Chakrabarty, 2008:96). The relation between Europe and non-European diaspora living in EU-member states received little attention in the dominant media in the socio-political discourse surrounding the referendum. The civic participation, and in particular the civic activism, of diaspora, provided the opportunity to start from the assumption that 'transnationalism [comes] from below' (Della Porta et al., 2006; Faist & Bauböck, 2010:15). The bottom-up perspective gave insights into the way diaspora activists (re)construct the imaginative geography of 'Europe.'

First, the representations which were posted on online social media will be displayed. Followed by the narratives behind the representations. Thereafter, the practices and performance will be discussed. The constitutive role of the imaginative geography of 'Europe' in the non-EU diasporas' understanding of belonging to Europe, became clear in the dichotomies they applied to European politics (Said, 1978).

Likewise to the previous chapter, new insights were gathered by bringing heterogeneity in the imagination perspective by taking a bottom-up perspective in the (re)construction of the imaginative geography of Europe (Chakrabarty, 2000:148). The lack of historical, legal, cultural or economic restrictions in the definition of Europe in this research, turned out to be correct, as the objective of this chapter is to illustrate that, according to Ukrainian diaspora activists, the imaginative geography of 'Europe' is based on the foundational norms and values instead of EU-membership.

7.1. Representations

The online and offline used representations which informants labeled as 'Europe' or 'European' were all symbols of flags of the EU. This paragraph displays a couple of the online usage of symbols of the EU flag.

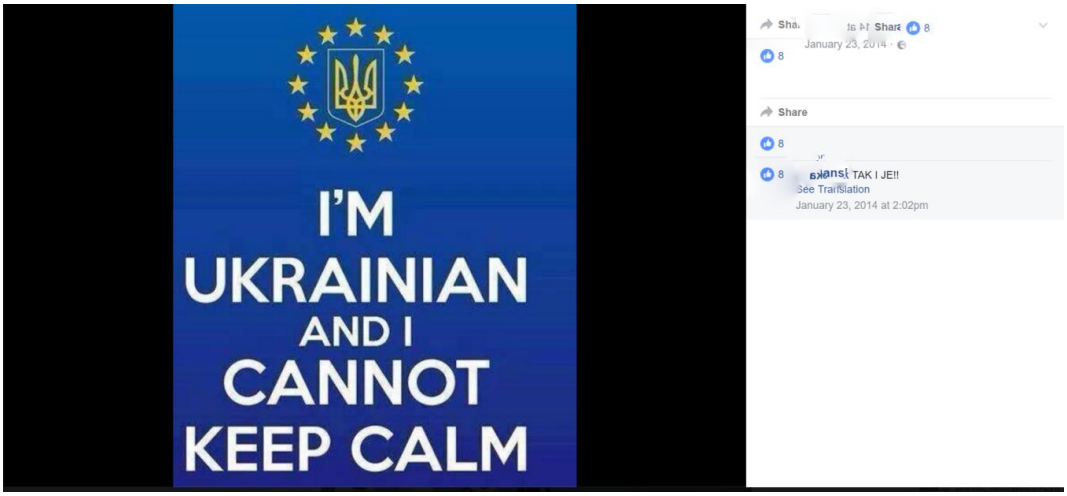

Figure 17

Figure 18

7.2. Narratives behind the representations

> ***"That the Ukrainian national colors and the European colors are the same is a very useful convenience, that might be a coincidence, but then it is a lucky one."***

Informants used the European flag during demonstrations and activities to advocate that Ukraine is also part of Europe. Ukraine was not a member of the EU, but according to informants, it did have the same norms and values as EU member countries. That is the reason the European stars are depicted around the national code of arms and the geographical outline of Ukraine (figure 17 & 18).
According to Ukrainian diaspora, being 'European' was not based on legal membership, but they defined Europe broader as they did not look at the legal membership of the EU.

Informants spoke about the European lifestyle with notions of a well-functioning tax system, transparency, open borders, knowledge and educational exchange, freedom of the press, democratic elections, open political discussion, and financial support for member countries to support equality. That lifestyle was based on a mentality. Informants categorized the European mentality with a set of norms and values. Informants labeled the European mentality with norms and values such as freedom to do whatever a person wants to do, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom to love, equality of sexualities, equality before the law, non-corrupt, democracy, and respect for human rights.

The same set of norms and values were categorized as the foundational principles of the EU. Since informants mentioned the same mentality and norms and values as for their imaginative geography of Ukraine, they used the flag of the EU to symbolize the commonality between the two.

7.3. Practices and performances

Informants expressed their opinion about European politics in different ways. First of all, informants followed the actions of the EU foreign affairs. It needs to be noted that most informants said that they did not follow the political debate. However, informants talked about topics such as the EU policies against Russia and the pressure that the EU put on the Ukrainian government to pass legislative reforms. These opinions were expressed in the narratives behind other practices and performances. Demonstrations were held in different periods of time and with different reasons to organize and attend these activities (figures 19, 20, and 21).

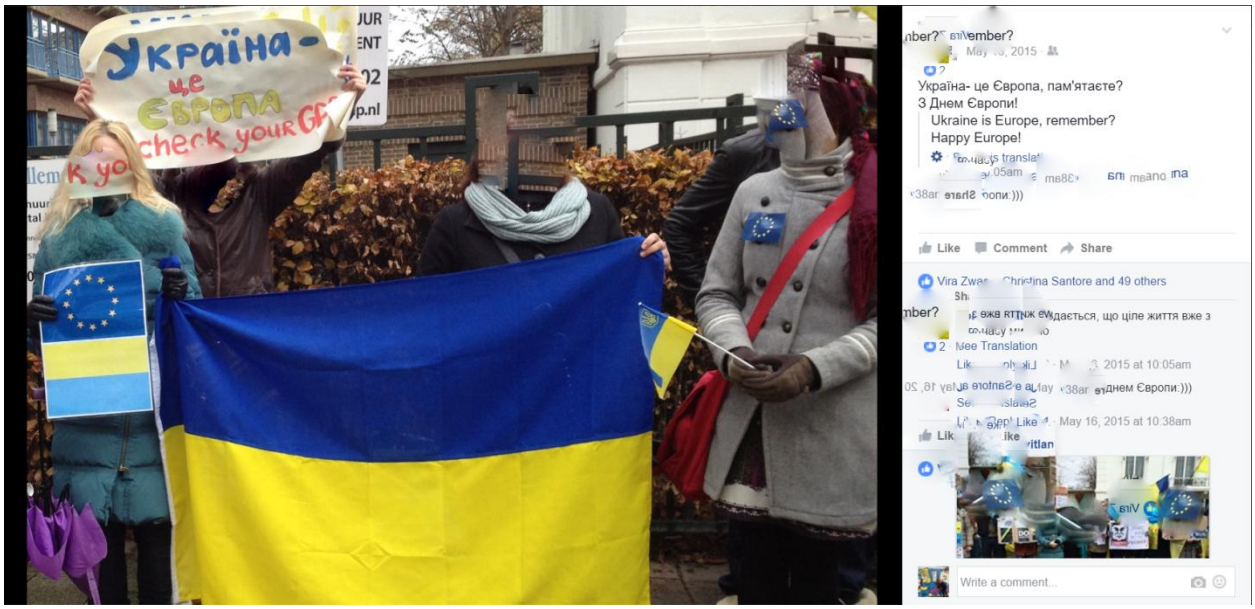

Figure 19

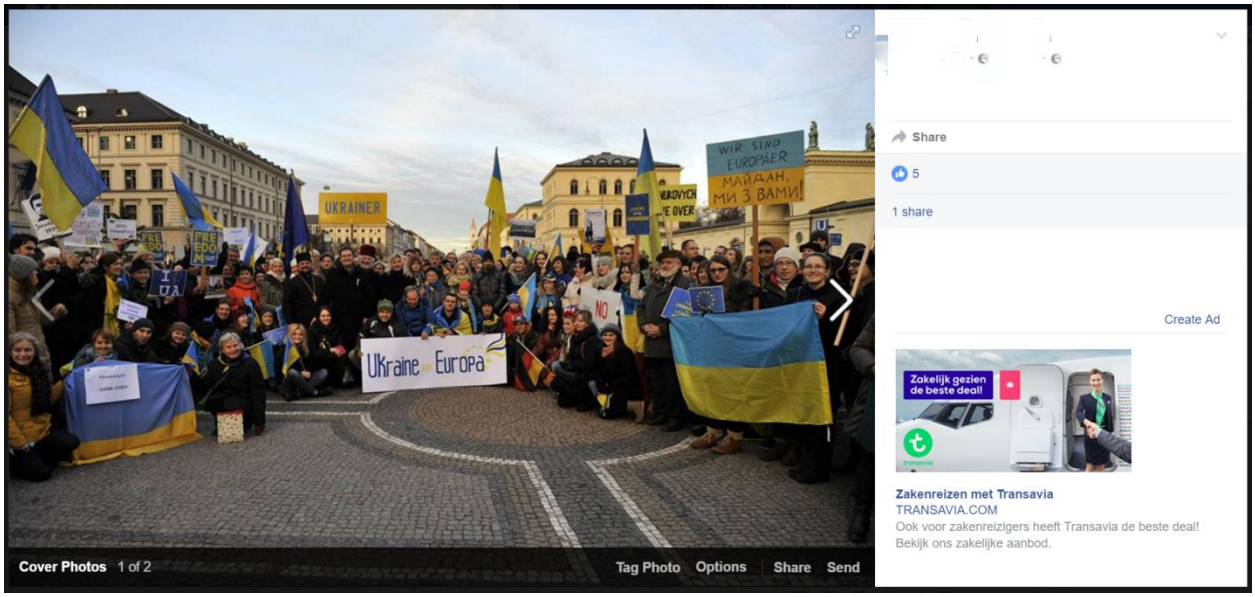

Figure 20

Figure 21

7.4. Narratives behind the practices and performances

7.4.1. The usage of the European flag

There were several reasons why European flags were used during demonstrations (figure 19 and 20). According to informants, the main reason for using the European flag was a call for attention from EU member states and EU politicians to give support to Ukraine.

Informants stressed that support entailed more than grants and loans from the EU. Informants gave more priority to diplomatic support. They explained this type of support meant, first of all, advice from the EU about reforms for anti-corruption policies. Furthermore, it entailed putting pressure on Russia to

leave Crimea, stop the abduction of Crimean Tartars, and stop the military attacks in eastern Ukraine. Here, informants perceived the EU as a moral-political role model regarding the norms and values that it was founded on.
All in all, the symbol of the EU flag took on a variety of meanings. Hence, the written out form which informants explained as being directed to the European community (figure 21).

Symbols were used to support the message that informants tried to transcend. Symbols are therefore closely connected to narratives, performances, and practices since informants used symbols to emphasize a message of the narratives, performances, and practices. It is correctly argued by Said (1978) and Gregory (2004) that images and symbols are part of practices and performances, and this is also visible in the pictures of demonstrations. Nonetheless, symbols need to be researched separately from the narratives to understand the meaning of the images and symbols.

Informants made an indirect differentiation between Europe and the European Union, which became clear by analyzing their narratives.
On online pictures of one of these demonstrations (figure 21), informants held flags of Ukraine and banners with blue and yellow with the text "EUROPE open your eyes. It's time to stop that criminal.[31]" This illustrates that apart from having Europe in a visual/symbol form (such as a flag), also Ukrainian diaspora activists used it in a written way.
'Europe' was used to refer to the European Union as a political institution. Informants talked in offline conversations about the European politicians and the political situation within the EU. Informants spoke about two topics that they referred to in relation to the European political situation. First of all, the political debate leading up to the referendum in their country of residence. Secondly, the United Kingdom leaving the EU as a result of the Brexit referendum. Both of these topics were examples of politicians and society losing out of sight, or, in other words, did not seem to remember, the reason for a selected group of countries in Europe to unite themselves in the political institution which these days is known as the EU. Informants explained that the reason for unification was that the countries agreed that they had the same foundational norms and values. That mentality and its norms and values had to be protected and secured, by uniting each other in an official political institution.
These days, people in Europe forgot the mentality and the foundational norms and values of the EU. Despite that EU member states and citizens questioned whether or not they still agreed on those foundations, informants hoped that those debates would lead back to countries uniting in those same norms and values of the original mentality.
The imaginative geography of 'Europe' consisted out of a continent of people who have the same mentality and norms and values. Those norms and values were labeled as the political foundations of the EU.

In addition to referring to both the EU and the continent as 'Europe,' they also used the word 'Europe' to refer something more encompassing than territory. Informants argue that Ukraine is part of Europe for three reasons.

[31] Original text: "EUROPA, open je doppen. Het is tijd om die crimineel te stoppen."

Firstly, Ukraine is geographically located on the continent of Europe. Secondly, informants argued that Ukraine is part of Europe because Ukraine has been part of different empires which historically stretched from the western coast of Europe to the territory of contemporary Ukraine. Because Ukraine was historically always part of those empires, Ukraine went through the same developments and is now still part of Europe.
Informants delivered a third reason which illustrated that they based their imagined 'European Ukraine' on the foundations of the EU.

> ***"If there was some kind of symbolism in the European Union, I don't know at the time when it was assembled and created; it seems that it has been forgotten. Because it is my deep belief that the European Union should not be treated just as some organization for free trade between states and free movement between states. It is something which in the era of after World War two on this continent where so many wars have been waged for hundreds of years. It is an institution that first and for most unites all of these European states on some core fundamental values and understanding to exist we need to co-exist here with agreeing on some basic principles of how we build our lives. That doesn't mean that we are waging wars against each other. But building our lives around, again, these principles of freedom, equality before the law, equal rights and so on and so forth."***[32]

The online and offline usage of symbols of yellow stars (whether in a flag or as part of the visual decoration of banners/flyers) resembled a sense of belonging to the European mentality.
To summarize, the inclusion of Ukraine in their imaginative geography of 'Europe' showed that it was based on norms and values, instead of legal membership to the European Union.

7.4.2. International politics & Russia

On almost daily basis informants applied another practice since they followed the European and international politics. A major international political event which they described as "shocking" and "outrageous," was a heated topic in European media. According to informants A., E., I., T., and U., the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States of America was for two reasons, "more emotional for them [us] than for the other Europeans."
Firstly, Trump supported the European far-right front in their Eurosceptic and populistic views to disintegrate the EU. This was emphasized with his campaign, speeches and, posts and tweets on social media such as Twitter and Facebook. Secondly, Trump was accused of having close ties with the Russian government and Putin himself.
The latter reason explained the suspicion, disappointment, and distress with which informants watched the election of Trump. Ukrainian activists in the Netherlands experienced a collective averse to Trump's election, which formed an additional illustration of the transnational links in this world.

[32] Informant E.

In the previous chapter, it is discussed that informants dichotomized Ukrainian politics into 'modern Ukraine' versus 'Russia.' The fact that the new American president was surrounded by accusations of a relationship with Russia made that Trump was labeled as '(pro-)Russian' and therefore perceived as a negative influence on Ukrainian development. For that reason, the election of Trump was watched with big suspicion, disappointment, and distress.

It goes to show, that the dichotomization of international and European politics was done in a similar dichotomization - 'Russia' versus 'Europe' – as the dichotomization in the (re)construction of the imaginative geography of 'Ukraine.'

Ukrainian activists in the Netherlands had a strong negative connotation with Russian politics, Putin and anyone who had an associative relationship with that country or its president.

This dichotomization of European politics shows that what Said (1978) called 'production of distance,' is also done by informants. European politics was set off against a category other than Europe itself, which dramatizes the distance between the place imagined and the 'other.' Consequently, the imaginative geography of 'Europe' was found in the narratives and the usage of EU-flags. Gregory (1994) argued that the imaginative geography of Europe produced what informants labeled by the name of 'Europe.' Next to that, the imaginative geography of Europe was also found in how Ukrainian activists performed this imaginative geography in their demonstrations and activities.

7.5. Narratives of 'representations' versus 'practices and performances'

In narratives about the usage of the European flag, informants labeled the EU political system as the opposite of the Russian political system. But during demonstrations in public spaces, this was not communicated in so many words since the focus of those demonstrations was on the Russian geopolitical interest on Ukrainian territory.

However, from privately held narratives it became clear that informants made categories of 'Europe' and 'Russia.'

The dichotomy of these categories was based on the difference in the norms and values. Informants gave an example: European actions such as helping each other financially were labeled as "lifting each other to an equal economic position." Informants saw this as a completely different mentality from Russian actions. The category of 'Russia' was labeled with the opposite mentality, for example, inequality. According to informants, this mentality was reflected in the Russian actions such as starting the war in eastern Ukraine, annexing Crimea, shooting down the MH17, and sabotaging in the American democracy.

In contrast to the Russian political system which meant corruption, no respect for human rights, authoritarian, a closed political system, oligarchy, the European political system stood for non-corrupt, freedom, democracy, respect for human rights, equality, and respect for the law and democracy. The characteristics informants labeled as 'Europe' were needed to put pressure on Russia.

> ***"E.: In the Netherlands just as in many other places right now around the world it is obvious that moods of fear of the otherness and fear of foreigners let put it this way, coming to the country they are present.***

Researcher: You say it is obvious. It's obvious that people are scared of foreigners. Why obvious, could you explain that?

E.: I also see a whole range of activities that occurred during the past year, during 2016. That are expressions of these driven by fear and xenophobia. It's Brexit, which includes the election of Trump in the US, and that also includes the referendum about the Association Agreement with Ukraine and the negative outcome of that referendum in the sense that the Dutch voted against the Association Agreement with Ukraine."[33]

"What is different for me after the referendum and is confirmed by Brexit and the election of Trump is that politics is too much focused on itself and it seems not be aware of the 'realpolitik' – which is present to the public."[34]

"And also we try, also as a foundation, not to just focus on a national scale but as an organization in Europe. To go global, yeah right now we are very small. But our idea is to go globally, we address Europe."[35]

"Promoting that it's a country that is open to the world, that's a country that wants to be part of the Europe and the international community."[36]

7.6. EU-membership and the relation with norms and values

Informants were aware that Ukraine was not an EU-member state, but they detached the legal association with the EU from a sense of belonging to Europe.

Therefore Europe became a political institution, instead of a landmass, a continent, or a geography on the map. In the activism of Ukrainian activists, they wanted to transcend the message that Ukraine is also part of Europe. For that reason, informants imagined Europe broader than fixed borders based on legal membership. Instead, informant focused on the norms and values which formed the foundations of Europe.

The bottom-up perspective of the diaspora activists showed that the active use of their agency Ukrainian diaspora activists created a meaning of 'Europe' which included their country of origin. The change of perspective illustrated that indeed transnationalism comes from below, as Ukrainian diaspora perceived the European borders as fluid instead of fixed (Della Porta et al., 2006).

Informants interpreted the referendum in the Netherlands (and the United Kingdom) as that both the foundational norms and values of 'Europe' were open for debate, and the norms and values were forgotten and stepped aside from by the Netherlands. Informants perceived the exit of the United

[33] Informant E.

[34] Informant Ri. Original quotation: Wat voor mij anders is na het referendum en wat door Brexit en de verkiezing van Trump bevestigen is dat de politiek is te veel met zichzelf bezig en lijkt de reaalpolitiek niet goed te beseffen - wat onder het publiek leeft.

[35] Informant C.

[36] Informant A.

Kingdom from the EU as a national collective amnesia of the foundational norms and values of the European mentality. Furthermore, informants said that the Netherlands lost the European norms and values out of sight when its citizens voted against the Association Agreement. Informants were convinced that these trajectories would eventually lead back to the European mentality and its norms and values for all countries of the European continent.

7.7. The essence of 'Europe,' according to informants

The European flags or symbols of blue with yellow stars were used during demonstrations and activities. The flags symbolized both for the European continent and for the European political institution (the EU).
Informants said that the European lifestyle was based on the European mentality. Norms and values such as political and budgetary transparency, tax system, freedom of mobility, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, open political discussion, and financial support for member countries to support equality, formed the foundations of the European mentality.
Informants imagined Europe as a continent which included Ukraine, despite that it did not have an EU membership. Informants did so by pointing out that the norms and values which member state countries agreed-upon at the foundation of the EU, were increasingly part of 'modern Ukraine.' Despite that Ukraine was a non-EU member state, informants framed Ukraine as 'European,' because Ukraine internalized the same norms and values.
Furthermore, the EU was imagined as capable of giving financial and moral support to Ukraine, as it has a history of implementing freedom, democracy, equality, and respect for the law, as Ukraine continued to implement the same norms and values in its current policies.
Informants believed that the tug-of-war over the 'European' norms and values with Brexit, the (outcome of the) referendum in the Netherlands and the Italian national elections - were examples that the European mentality underwent negotiations. Nevertheless, informants did believe that the European foundational norms and values will be the end result of these negotiations.
Informants dichotomized the European politics into 'Europe' versus 'Russia.' The above-mentioned norms and values were the characteristics of 'Europe,' and the European mentality. Interestingly, informants labeled the same norms and values in the dichotomization of Ukrainian politics, 'modern Ukraine' versus 'Russia.' Thus, informants imagined the core of the triangle of imaginative geographies with overlapping foundational norms and values.

8. Conclusion

This research investigated how Ukrainian diaspora activists in the Netherlands contested/transformed/negotiated their imaginative geographies of 'the Netherlands,' 'Ukraine,' and 'Europe.'

Imaginative geographies are often perceived as a top-down construction process, but in a globalized world wherein imaginative geographies are under public scrutiny, the diasporas' bottom-up perspective needs to be incorporated. In the socio-political discourse, with events such as Brexit in the United Kingdom and the referendum in the Netherlands on the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine, a bottom-up perspective was missing.

The triangle of imaginative geographies wherein the Ukrainian diaspora activists found themselves, was researched at times of the referendum in the Netherlands. This research gave voice to the often dismissed perspective of the diaspora in the socio-political discourse about the (re)construction of Europe.

8.1. Access & methods

The exclusive bottom-up perspective into the (re)construction of imaginative geographies of Ukrainian diaspora activists in the Netherlands has endured during a field research for three months. The field research period gained insights in the (re)construction of imaginative geographies by investigating the expressions of civic participation: cultural and political activities, demonstrations, and the meaning of on- and offline representations. Civic participation is public involvement in politics in the country of residence. When civic participation is part of a social movement, civic participation turns into civic activism. Therefore, civic activism is a specific form of civic participation. Civic participation was the framework wherein the three imaginative geographies were investigated because the (re)construction mechanisms of imaginative geographies are reflected in civic participation.

The on- and offline representations and practices and performances were expressed in cultural and political activities and demonstrations. Participant observation and interviews were used to understand the activists' civic participation. During semi-structured interviews, online posted symbols and pictures (visuals) from informants were discussed to understand their interpretation and meaning of these representations.

The (re)construction of imaginative geographies is dominated by the political elite. Since this research looks at imaginative geographies from the perspective of the diaspora, instead of the political elite, it emphasizes that imagination should be understood as a heterogeneous practice. The used methods provided a detailed understanding of the behavior, narratives and the interpretation of from the diasporas' imagination point of view.

It resulted in new insights into the body of literature on 'imaginative geographies' and 'civic participation' by taking into account the (re)construction mechanisms of the imaginative geographies: representations (which were subdivided into online and offline images, symbols and narratives), and practices and performances.

8.2. Results & insights

Four insights are provided by applying a bottom-up perspective of civic participation to the (re)construction of imaginative geographies. First of all, it is not sufficient to focus solely on the public

sphere to understand the (re)construction of imaginative geographies. Namely, this researched showed that one of the two categories in the dichotomy of an imaginative geography was expressed in the public sphere. Since civic participation focuses on the public sphere, half of the dichotomy of an imaginative geography was missing. The other category was hidden from the public sphere but expressed in the private sphere.

Secondly, Ukrainian diaspora activists showed that the socio-political context complicates the relationship between civic participation and the sense of belonging the country of residence. The findings of this research contradict the linear relation as suggested by Bloemraad (2000). According to Bloemraad (2000), the political involvement in the country of residence shows an increase in the sense of belonging to that country. Instead, Ukrainian diaspora activists showed that they experienced friction in their sense of belonging to their country of residence.

Thirdly, in the literature about civic participation, the focus is the 'country of residence,' which is used to refer to a nation-state. In the on- and offline representations, Ukrainian diaspora activists expressed a sense of belonging to Ukraine, the Netherlands, and Europe. The latter, though, is not a nation-state, but a supranational country. Thus, as this research showed, the country of residence also refers to a broader range of geographies. This shows that civic participation focuses on a larger range of imaginative geographies at the same time.

Lastly, Ukrainian diaspora activists imagined the core of the three imaginative geographies to have the same set of norms and values. Thereby they were able to experience a sense of belonging to the triangle of imaginative geographies. It goes to show, the second feature of imaginative geographies as presented by Said (1978), 'the creation of identity,' is expressed differently by the Ukrainian diaspora activists. Instead of the comparison of 'our' norms and values with 'their' norms and values leading to perceiving *difference* (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Beech, 2014), it leads to perceiving the *overlap and commonalities* of these three imaginative geographies and their norms and values.

These insights will be discussed in detail in the subsequent four paragraphs.

8.2.1. The importance and separation of symbols & hidden categorizations

The public and private sphere play an important role in the understanding of the (re)construction of imaginative geographies. Civic participation focuses on public representations, and practices and performances (Preston et al., 2006:1634; Ehrkamp, 2006). Nonetheless, civic participation does not stop at the doorstep of people their houses. On the contrary, people who take on civic participation became civically active out of personal and private reasons (Della Porta & Diani, 2006:47-49). These personal and private reasons were not always expressed in the civic activism. Also, it is relevant to include the private sphere, as the counter category is not necessarily part of the publically used representation and practices and performances.

Ukrainian diaspora activists showed that one category of the dichotomy of the imaginative geography of 'Ukraine' was hidden from the public sphere. The counter category became evident by getting access to the private sphere.

Ukrainian diaspora activists used symbols in their civic participation which they labeled with 'modern Ukraine' and 'Europe.' Both of these categories form a dichotomy with the category of 'Russia.' Importantly, the latter category was not part of their civic participation. Instead, the latter was almost only privately used in their offline narratives.

Holloway and Valentine (2000), Beech (2014), and Gregory (2004:8) argue that a dichotomy of an imaginative geography can only be understood when both categories of the dichotomy are known.
Ukrainian diaspora activists performed only one category. The only way, through which the unknown/hidden category can be named and understood, is by taking into account the private narratives of informants.
There were demonstrations and online symbols (e.g. figure 14) which dealt with the topic of 'Russia,' but informants were hesitant in sharing the narratives behind these demonstrations and symbols. So these narratives were kept between the Ukrainian diaspora activists unless a researcher actively seeks out to include these private narratives.

8.2.2. The relation between civic participation and the sense of belonging

The referendum in the Netherlands about the Association Agreement and Ukraine put informants in a position wherein their country of residence held a socio-political discourse about their country of origin.

> ***"How would you feel? If your country [of origin] is under public scrutiny to get the Association Agreement signed? After the people exceeded themselves by standing by each other during a nationwide revolution to get the Agreement, which your former president tried to take away from you with violent attacks. And then, the country where you live, where you enjoy your life and care for, stands up and votes that that Agreement should be taken away from you anyway? Tell me, how would you feel?"***[37]

The transnational position of diaspora was touched upon because of the socio-political discourse. Nonetheless, informants did not perceive the dominant socio-political discourse to question their residence in the Netherlands. As a result, informants did not feel that Dutch voters were othering Ukrainian diaspora as Ukrainians. Instead, informants felt that in the dominant discourse Ukrainians were categorized apart from Europeans. It was this categorization of their country of origin which informants did not agree with.
Their civic participation was focused on contestation of the imaginative geographies of Ukraine and Europe. That the focus was on the latter two imaginative geographies reflected their offline practices and performances of activities and demonstrations, and the on- and offline used representations, because barely any of those features were focused on 'the Netherlands.'

The civic participation of Ukrainian diaspora in the Netherlands did show that informants experienced a sense of belonging to the country where they were politically involved (Bloemraad, 2000; Preston et al., 2006). The degree to which an individual informant experienced a sense of belonging to their country of residence varied per person.
Here, two insights in the relation between civic participation and the sense of belonging came to surface. Bloemraad (2000) argued that the people who are civically active experienced an increase of

[37] Informant Z.

the sense of belonging to the country of residence. However, informants experienced friction in their sense of belonging to the Netherlands. Informants said they felt less comfortable because of the referendum since it concerned their country of origin. Informants performed their civic participation out of friction they experienced in the comfort and ease with which they lived in their country of residence. In other words, depending on the socio-political context where people are civically active, their sense of belonging to the country of residence can also a decrease or experience friction.

8.2.3. 'Supranational' country of residence

Civic participation needs a broader conceptualization regarding the 'country' of residence to which it refers.

In the conceptualization of civic participation scholars such as Bloemraad (2000) and Preston et al. (2006) write about the sense of belonging to the 'country of residence.' Here, these scholars did not specify what they defined as 'country' of residence. Normatively, 'country' refers to a national geography, such as the Netherlands and Ukraine.

Informants felt that in the dominant discourse 'Ukrainians' were categorized separately from 'Europeans.' Informants imagined Ukraine as part of Europe based on a mentality which they labeled as 'European.' The Ukrainian diaspora activists felt that Ukraine shared this mentality with Europe. Civic participation was therefore focused on the inclusion of non-EU members in the imaginative geography of 'Europe.'

Despite that informants experienced a friction in the sense of belonging to their 'country of residence, ' being the Netherlands, one should not forget that the Netherlands was imagined as part of 'Europe.' And, informants organized activities and demonstrations to illustrate their sense of belonging to Europe. Since Europe is a supranational geography, the 'country of residence' should include "national and supranational spaces" (Vanderbeck, 2006:643) in its conceptualization of civic participation.

Ukrainian diaspora activists explained the sense of belonging to Ukraine, the Netherlands, and Europe, as a consequence of the commonality of norms and values of the three imaginative geographies.

8.2.4. Overlapping norms and values

A detailed understanding of the way Ukrainian diaspora activists used the commonality and overlapping of norms and values to experience a sense of belonging to three different imaginative geographies will follow below.

Informants showed that, first of all, their country of origin became increasingly modern in the mentality of people and political institutions since the EuroMaidan movement. This modernization was set off against a mentality which was a remnant of the Soviet Union and consequently was categorized as 'Russia'. This last mentality was labeled with characteristics of corrupt, no freedom, no freedom of speech, no equality, human rights violations, oligarchy, closed political circle. The mentality of 'Russia' was dichotomized with the category of 'modern Ukraine' which represented a mentality with freedom, freedom of speech and press, equality, equality and respect for the law, and democracy. The reason for Ukrainian diaspora activists in the Netherlands to label it as 'modern Ukraine' was because of the development of the 'Russia(n)' mentality in Ukraine towards a new mentality with norms and values which corresponded with the foundational norms and values of the EU. It is the mentality that made Ukraine 'European.'

The imaginative geography of Europe was imagined as a two-folded entity: the continent Europe and the political institution of the EU. 'Ukraine' was imagined to be part of both the continent and of the mentality upon which the EU was founded. According to informants, that mentality consisted out of norms and values which were identical to the norms and values of modern Ukraine and the Netherlands. The Netherlands is an EU-member state and is at the heart of the European continent, and had, therefore, the same foundational norms and values. Informants perceived the socio-political discourse about the (re)construction of Europe, with events such as the referendum in the Netherlands, Italy, and the United Kingdom, as an illustration of the European trajectory towards finding back its original foundational norms and values of the EU. The imaginative geography of 'Ukraine' is since the start of the EuroMaidan movement also on a trajectory: the trajectory of modernization to develop the same norms and values as informants imagined to belong to the imaginative geographies of 'the Netherlands' and 'Europe'.

Thus, Ukrainian diaspora labeled each imaginative geography with a set of norms and values. Thereafter they did not compare the norms and values of each imaginative geography. Therefore they did not see the difference between, for example, the imaginative geographies of 'Ukraine' and 'Europe'. Instead, they perceived the *overlap and commonalities* of the three imaginative geographies and their norms and values.

> ***"Essentially, it is easy to understand. I don't see any difference between the Netherlands, Ukraine and Europe. It's just all about coming to senses with freedom, equality, and democracy. It's all about freedom, equality, and democracy."***

8.3. Limitations

This research has limitations of both sampling and access.

The first limitation came forward in the hidden categorization in the private sphere. According to Ukrainian diaspora activists, the topic of 'Russia' was not a public discussed matter. This research was embedded in socio-political context, but informants were initially not willing to talk about political topics out of protection for themselves and the Ukrainian community. Hereby, the period to build up trust was long at times (weeks or sometimes months depending on the topic and informant). Before trust built the political information, which is at the core of this research, was hidden from conversational topics. Consequently, politically correct answers heavily colored initial data about categorizations and political information. The hidden categorization of 'Russia' surfaced shortly before the field research period was over, whereby it was included in the research report. Hidden categories can also not surface and skew the research results badly, as categorizations are needed in order to understand imaginative geographies. In a case study as this one, there is a lot of data which limits an easy analysis. Let alone, seeing in time that informants hide information and include the hidden information in time in the analysis.

Especially informants stressed the importance of the initially hidden topic of Russia. They felt it was relevant to the point that the researcher was offered to read personal diaries and family letters. Informant believed these personal records would enable the researcher to understand the difference between Ukrainians and Russians better.

Furthermore, the interaction of the imaginative geographies of the Ukrainian diaspora activists and the imaginative geographies of the political elite are left out of the scope of this research. Because of a lack of time, the interaction was left absent from this research. The inclusion of the interaction would add another layer of depth to the academic knowledge of the relationship between civic participation and imaginative geographies.

8.4. Some final words

At the end of this thesis, there is one conceptual and one practical guideline for anyone who wants to do research in the field of imaginative geographies and civic participation.

As this research illustrated, it is important to include symbols and what they symbolize under the (re)construction mechanism of imaginative geographies of what Said called "poetics of space." Otherwise, it leaves out of sight the potential (supra)national meaning and interpretations of imaginative geographies. Also, it is a good step towards seeing potential hidden categorizations and dichotomizations.

A second recommendation is to take the time to build trust with informants since politics can be a sensitive topic. In doing so, the quality of the interviews will potentially improve. That way, categories and dichotomizations which are hidden behind privacy and political correctness can be discovered.

There are two recommendations for further future research into imaginative geographies.

Firstly, a larger sample is needed to fathom the impact of the way activists imagined the three researched imaginative geographies. It is advised to sample more diaspora activists who lived both shorter and longer periods of time in the country of residence.

Also, there are ongoing socio-political discourses about the meaning and relevance of Europe. Therefore, there needs to be more academic knowledge about the (re)construction of the imaginative geography of Europe by European citizens. Once a body of knowledge is built on how European citizens (re)construct the imaginative geography of Europe, EU-politicians can be advised to polish future policy about, for example, maps and symbols, by keeping in mind the imaginative geography that European citizens and people have. That way, the policy and the imaginative geography of its people will fit each other better.

Some final words, by seeing the (re)construction discourse about Europe from the perspective of non-EU member state diaspora the overlapping norms and values of freedom, equality, respect for law and democracy become apparent. This can inspire European politicians and people to see this commonality and consequently smoothen the political battles.

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Appendix A

Interview Overview

Informant	Duration	How	Recorded
Informant Ok.	58 minutes	In person	Yes
Informant D.	38 minutes	In person	Yes
Informant L.	1h 5 minutes	Skype	Yes
Informant U.	1h 23 minutes	In person	Yes
Informant O.	35 minutes	In person	Yes
Informant C.	45 minutes	Skype	Yes
Informant T.	39 minutes	In person	Yes
Informant Y.	1h 35 minutes	In person	Yes
Informant I.	52 minutes	In person	Yes
Informant V.	1h 38 minutes	In person	Yes
Informant N.	1h 13 minutes	In person	Yes
Informant Z.	1h 4 minutes	In person	Yes
Informant E.	1h 57 minutes	In person	Yes
Informant G.	1h 8 minutes	Skype	Yes
Informant Ri.	1h 5 minutes	In person	No
Informant H.	55 minutes	In person	No
Informant W.	1h 30 minutes	In person	No
Informant A.	55 minutes	Skype	No

Appendix B

Impression interview topic lists

- Reason to move to the Netherlands
- Expectations of the Netherlands: daily life, culture, etc.
- When/why start contact Ukrainian community NL
- Run into or usage of Ukrainian background
- Relationship to the Netherlands
- Relationship to Ukraine
- Consider yourself active in Ukrainian community / Activism / Objective
- Organize, attend activities/objective
- Activity usage attributes (e.g. flags, banners, posters, flyers, books, artists, music)
- Organize, attend parties/objective
- Party usage attributes (e.g. flags, banners, posters, flyers, books, artists, music)
- Organize, attend demonstrations / objective
- Demonstration usage attributes (e.g. flags, banners, posters, flyers, books, artists, music)
- Frame referendum / Political debate / Outcome
- Relationship Ukraine – Europe
- Difference, commonalities Ukrainians & Europeans
- Personal relation to Europe
- Meaning ‘European’