



## Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

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Title: Russian Hybrid Warfare in Ukraine: the Annexation of Crimea and the Donbas War

Programme/year: International Relations MA, 2021

Author of Evaluation (supervisor/external assessor): Zack Kramer, external assessor

| Criteria              | Definition                                  | Maximum    | Points |
|-----------------------|---|------------|--------|
| <b>Major Criteria</b> |   |            |        |
|                       | Research question, definition of objectives | <b>10</b>  | 7      |
|                       | Theoretical/conceptual framework            | <b>30</b>  | 24     |
|                       | Methodology, analysis, argument             | <b>40</b>  | 30     |
| <i>Total</i>          |   | <b>80</b>  | 61     |
| <b>Minor Criteria</b> |   |            |        |
|                       | Sources                                     | <b>10</b>  | 8      |
|                       | Style                                       | <b>5</b>   | 4      |
|                       | Formal requirements                         | <b>5</b>   | 5      |
| <i>Total</i>          |   | <b>20</b>  | 17     |
| <b>TOTAL</b>          |   | <b>100</b> | 78     |



## Evaluation

Major criteria: 'Hybrid war' and the 'Russian world', the two core concepts in the study, are poorly defined and without any referenced to established works. The research question is too open-ended, but still roughly outlines appropriate space for the study's research agenda. However, we are left wondering whether the prima facie answer to this question is simply that socio-cultural and identitative manipulations are an inherent part of the definition of hybrid warfare; the lack of a clear definition of hybrid warfare leads to some confusion here.

The chosen methodology, two parallel qualitative case studies spanning imperial-era, Soviet and contemporary history while focusing on two interrelated but distinct modern conflicts (Donbas and Crimea) and incorporating elements of constructivist analysis of identity constructions, could be much more coherently specified. A general lack of logical organization in the thesis makes it difficult to follow the author's train of thought at times and probably could have been avoided through more clarity about the chosen methodology.

The conceptualization of the Russian World identifies most of the relevant underpinnings of the concept and does a good job of explaining its relationship to modern Ukraine; however, the blurring together of the development of the concept itself and criticism of that concept makes this section somewhat logically muddled; arguments are interposed throughout but don't really cohere into one unified position.

The turn to a deep historical review of the relationship between Ukraine, Russia and Crimea is sort of an unexpected turn and is not well-anticipated by the study's introductory/ methodological section. The historical section on Crimea shows a good command of the relevant points of the peninsula's history, but, despite running for some 7 pages, does little to refer back to the study's core concepts, hybrid warfare and manipulation of 'Russian World' identity by the Russian state. It basically concludes in the mid-1990s without any clear argumentation and thus does not tie-in coherently with the rest of the study's focal points.

The structure of the section on Donbas is also unexpected as it involves essentially no historical narrative at all, but rather focuses on analysis of contemporary demographic statistics. However, overall in this section the connections between the 'Russian World', manipulation of social-cultural identity, and pro-Russian political attitudes there does emerge much more clearly.



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The long historical review of the Donbas conflict itself is again rather confusing; it mostly depicts details of conventional warfare developments and does not have any clear relationship with the main research question. However, it is appropriately sourced and does provide a cogent narrative of the conflict.

It is only around page 36 that we get a clear discussion of the meaning of hybrid warfare and its conceptual applicability to Ukraine-Russia war case; this is reasonably well written but most of it belongs much, much earlier in the paper. Likewise, the section on constructivist theory is well-written and identifies the main tenets of the approach, but it would make much more sense to posit this before the lengthy empirical section in order to guide the reader along the author's line of reasoning.

The discussion about the constructed social identities of Ukraine and Russia in the context of the collapse of the USSR and contemporary geopolitics is the most convincing and original part of the thesis. Chapter 3 is by far the strongest of the chapters, although the closing discussion of the Ukrainian media environment is not well-connected to other core arguments and ends the chapter rather abruptly and awkwardly.

The conclusion suffers from the same problems of the text as a whole; it consists primarily of the recapitulation of historical facts without clear reference to the study's theoretical or methodological framework or developing its sub-sections into analytical argumentation. The actual section of the conclusion that pertains to the study's research question is well-enough written but left until the text's final page and not fully developed.

Minor criteria:

The style is overall conventional and understandable, but I do note some careless mistakes that do affect flow and comprehensibility, particularly in the first ten pages or so (e.g. "hotel regions"). The thesis's whole introduction proceeds with generic stylized facts about the 2013/2014 period in Ukraine and hybrid war, with no use of references; this lack of clear reference points adds to the confusion around the definitions of hybrid war and other key concepts. However, both style and sourcing generally improve in the later sections of the paper. The paper appears to meet all formal requirements.



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Overall evaluation: This paper involves a timely and stimulating topic and is able to outline some of the broad contours of Russian and Ukrainian socio-cultural identity and their interrelationship, and to discuss them in the context of hybrid war. However, it makes no real attempt at developing any sort of methodology, and has a generally weak introduction and conclusion, long passages of historical details that are not clearly connected back to the study's research question or main arguments, and an ineffective logical structure in which the study's overarching theoretical background and main arguments only emerge abruptly at the very end with limited reference to the introduction and first two chapters. The paper is overall well-researched and for the most part well-written style-wise, if somewhat difficult to follow at times.

Suggested grade: C+

Signature: 