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REPRESENTATIONS OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF THE WAR REALITY IN UKRAINE IN REPORTS ON THE ONET.PL WEBSITE

 <https://doi.org/10.2478/ppsr-2024-0012>

► Received: 31 July 2024 ► Accepted: 26 September 2024

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Data availability

The data that supports the findings of this study is available upon request from the corresponding authors. The numbering used for individual quotes comes from the original corpus of materials.

Abstract

The article aims to analyse how the Onet.pl website presents the process of experiencing the reality of war by Ukrainians and Russians affected by this conflict. The subject of the analysis is the materials presenting the individual stories of ordinary citizens of Ukraine and Russia suffering the consequences of the war. The corpus of materials selected as a result of the content analysis included 99 texts published on the most opinion-forming portal in Poland, Onet.pl, in the first half of 2024. The adopted theoretical and methodological perspective included the theory of representation and the concept of framing. The conducted analysis aimed to answer the following research questions: 1). What categories of people do the stories presented in Onet.pl materials concern? 2). What types of war experiences do Onet's editors choose to present to Polish audiences? 3). What general image of the Russian-Ukrainian war shapes or can shape the ways of presenting the stories of individuals who are experiencing the war reality? As a result of the research, eight dominant frames were identified: the suffering frame, the escape frame, the activity frame, the change/other world frame, the clash of civilizations frame, the moral activity frame, the women's frame, and the children's frame.

Keywords

Russian-Ukrainian war, war experiences, representations, interpretation frames

Outline of the problem and state of research

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has severely affected all of Ukrainian society, including the lives of millions of civilian citizens. The Russian aggressor has occupied a large part of the territory and is attacking educational institutions, hospitals, marketplaces, shopping malls, and other centres used by the civilian population. Civilians living in the areas occupied by Russia are terrorized and forced to accept passports and vote in elections; it is difficult for them to work or receive health services, they are resettled, and their children are being taken away. Many people had to leave their homes and workplaces, seeking safety in emigration. As with other armed conflicts that affect civilians in various ways (Boehland 2015), where the lines between war and terrorism are blurred (Tumber 2009), media representations of the war strongly attract public attention (Pavlik 2023).

Journalists covering the Russia-Ukraine conflict make extensive use of civilian witnesses as a source of information (Cassidy 2023). Testimonies transformed into journalist materials with their specific genre characteristics speak not so much about the war, but about the ways of experiencing the complicated war reality. They are usually highly subjective, fragmentary, open-ended, and inconclusive, but due to their performative potential (Felman 2004), they strongly influence the awareness, moral attitudes, evaluations, and behaviour of recipients. Personal experiences expressed as testimonies, a source of information for journalists, are understood here as ways of perceiving facts, events, or processes related to the war conflict, directly or indirectly affecting the lives of specific people (Yero *et al.* 2004). Representations of how war is experienced, processed for the needs of media communication, and disseminated through various channels present war's serious consequences on the mental health of individuals, social life organization, social bonds, and the culture of the entire society (Summerfield 1996). Due to this severe social problem, it is important to research media representations of the experience of war.

Media coverage of war conflicts and how individuals and communities experience war is rarely neutral and reliable. Usually, when selecting, editing, and disseminating information, journalists adopt the perspective of one of the parties (Nygren *et al.* 2016).

Since the beginning of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014, the media in various countries have devoted much attention to this issue, and media representations and interpretive frameworks regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict have become the subject of intense studies. It was found that the ways of reporting the Ukrainian-Russian conflict differed greatly among individual European countries. Interestingly, the media in Poland adopted the most anti-Russian attitude (even stronger than the media in Ukraine), and Polish journalists have revealed their committed attitudes (Nygren *et al.* 2016). Comparative studies on the presence of Russian aggression in the press of 13 European countries allowed us to conclude that Polish newspapers devote a lot of attention to this topic (Fengler *et al.* 2018).

Other studies have shown that information and comments on social media and websites in Poland, Ukraine, and Russia were very biased and showed the characteristics of organized actions (Szwed 2016). A comparative study of the messages of Russian and Ukrainian news agencies in the first months of full-scale aggression in 2022 showed the presence of several dominant frames: attacks on civilians and civilian victims, negotiations and talks, attacks on military targets, and the success frame, among which the most important frame is attacks on the civilian population (Wilson *et al.* 2023).

The language of texts (Adisti *et al.* 2022) and the visual aspect (Szulich-Kałuża, 2016, 2018; Zecchinon & Standaert 2024) played an important role in shaping images of armed conflict and creating social representations of war experiences. The frame of the content in reports about the war, for example, favoured perceiving the conflict through the prism of human rights violations (Selvarajah & Florino 2023), and visual framing indicated the multimodal dimension of disinformation around war conflicts (Hameleers *et al.* 2020; Thomson *et al.* 2022).

Methodology

Theoretical and methodological assumptions of the analysis

Experiences of the reality of war will be developed using the assumptions of Serge Moscovici's theory of social representations (Moscovici 1981, 1984a, 1994, 2000). Meaningful social representations lead to the emergence of shared cognitive constructs that shape patterns of thinking (Höijer 2011). According to Moscovici (1984b), there are two basic functions of representations. First, they conventionalize (anchor) concepts, people, events, and situations, giving them a specific linguistic or visual form. Second, they are prescriptive in the sense that they are suggested and even imposed on us through social contacts, established structures, and applicable rules of social coexistence. Representations aim "to make something unfamiliar, or unfamiliarity itself, familiar" (Moscovici 1984b).

These are firmly embedded in communication practices such as dialogues, debates, media, and public and scientific discourses (Marková 2003). They use several mechanisms to conventionalize phenomena, including naming, emotional anchoring, thematic anchoring, metaphorical anchoring, and anchoring by basic antinomies. The conducted analysis focuses on two mechanisms of representation formation: naming and thematic anchoring. By naming something, "we extricate it from a disturbing anonymity to endow it with a genealogy and include it in a complex of specific words, to locate it, in fact, in the identity matrix of our culture" (Moscovici 2000, 46). The second mentioned mechanism, thematic anchoring, involves the characterization of topoi related to the personal experience of war in the collected journalist materials.

In developing media representations of war experiences, it will be helpful to use a framing technique that combines theoretical inspirations from many areas, including linguistics, media studies, sociology, and psychology (Franczak 2017). Typically, framing researchers are interested in two types of frames: frames present in communication and individual frames. The first of these, also called media frames (and these are the subject of our further analyses), are defined as interpretative patterns embedded in media discourse using specific linguistic means and will be determined using qualitative content analysis. Individual frames (not covered by our analytical procedures), in turn, are cognitive schemas that process information at the level of specific individuals (Scheufele 1999; Chong, Druckman 2007).

Framing analysis allows us to see not only the optics, meaning the point of view of the authors of online material, but also the principles for selecting this material, combining various events into coherent narratives leading recipients to specific interpretations. We

assume that, by using frames focusing on meaning, Onet.pl's journalists shape a specific image of the war perceived by the portal's users. The Onet.pl website is one of the most popular internet portals and a significant opinion-forming medium in Poland¹. It belongs to the Ringier Axel Springer Polska concern. The analysis sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What categories of people do the stories presented in Onet.pl materials concern?
2. What types of war experiences do Onet's editors choose to present to Polish audiences?
3. What general image of the Russian-Ukrainian war shapes, or can shape, the ways of presenting the stories of individuals who are experiencing the war reality?

Research material and its selection criteria

The research material comes from the period from January 1 to June 30, 2024. The choice of 2024 as the time the analysed materials come from was driven by the motivation to include the third year of the war, marked by a certain familiarity with war and people getting used to the inflow of information regarding war activities. On the one hand, the idea was to capture the more routine activities of journalists, and, on the other, to determine what kind of representations of the personal experiences of people affected by war usually reach Polish audiences. It was also about checking whether such personal fates are not kept silent or do not disappear in the face of the dominant presence of information about the activities of entire countries, the armed forces, politicians and so on.

The corpus of the research material includes a total of 99 texts. The material was selected based on content and formal criteria. Formal criteria, apart from the time limit, included the place of publication (the *War in Ukraine* tab on the Onet.pl website) and the form of the text as the dominant information medium (the tab also includes video materials with only a short text announcement). As for the content, materials were selected of ordinary people describing their experiences of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The corpus excluded all materials relating to war as an armed conflict, battles on the front and the experiences of soldiers as participants in these battles, as well as materials discussing the functioning of states, international and supranational institutions and diplomatic activities (meaning various types of talks, arrangements, protests, negotiations, etc.).

The material was selected in such a way that the main actors of the events, and their described actions and emotional and conscious states, were people acting not as representatives of any institutions or entities, but as ordinary people: citizens, employees, family members, and victims. First of all, they were civilians, and if they were soldiers, then it was not in roles related to fighting on the frontline.

The available material from the *War in Ukraine* tab on the Onet.pl website is diverse in terms of genre. One can find classic news, but also interviews and reports. Most of these are also illustrated with photographs, although not all of them directly refer to the text (they only function as graphic illustrations that highlight the text). The graphic layout of the texts is characterized by high sensory stimulation that stimulates the cognitive activity of the recipient. In the perception process, the reader is exposed to a hypertext structure with the possibility of sharing texts on other communication sites. Additionally, the

1 <https://www.imm.com.pl/onet-utrzymuje-pozycje-lidera-najbardziej-opiniotworczych-medium-na-drugie-miejsce-awansuje-rzeczpospolita-a-podium-zamyka-tvn24/>

graphic structure uses simple procedures: highlighting titles, displaying bolds, changing font shapes and underlining.

The above-mentioned composition practices may provoke non-linear reception, but their main task is to make the text more attractive and standardized. As for authorship, some of the materials were prepared by the portal's journalists, while some are the result of cooperation with other media, including: "Bild," "Sestry," "Holod," "Politico," "Financial Times," "Meduza," "Welt," and "Novaya Gazeta". The procedure for selecting material for analysis did not include the criterion of origin, so the corpus included both original texts by the portal's journalists and those of cooperating media, prepared for publication and made available to recipients on the Onet.pl website.

Results of the Analysis

As a result of the preliminary content analysis of the 99 selected materials from Onet.pl, eight dominant frames representing ways of experiencing the war reality were identified. In some texts, one of these frames is dominant, while in others we are dealing with the simultaneous presence of several frames. The following description of individual frames refers to the most symptomatic examples of linguistic representations. The numbering used for individual quotes comes from the original corpus of materials.

1. The *suffering* frame (represented in the sample 38 times)

This frame identifies the sources and multiplicity of forms of suffering experienced during warfare. At the centre should be placed the enormity of the tragedy caused by Russia's military actions transferred from the front line to populated cities and the ruthlessness of the Russians attacking civilians: *All five floors collapsed. People sheltering in the basement were buried under the rubble* [11]; *Hundreds. A larger body, a medium body, a small body, even a smaller one, so tiny. Bodies, bodies, bodies, an endless row of bodies* [29]; *We saw many bombed cars with dead people, some lying next to their cars, even entire families* [58]. Therefore, death is common and universal. It affects ordinary, civilian inhabitants, and the dead are not treated with the proper respect that the tradition of European culture requires in terms of burial: *The bodies of the dead were lying everywhere in the city. (...) It happened that residents had to bury the bodies of their deceased neighbours in children's sandboxes or on football fields in their backyards, and place makeshift crosses on temporary graves* [11].

This frame is also filled with harrowing content about maximizing the victims' physical and mental pain: *Beating, kicking, electric shock, strangulation, rape. This is not enough for the torturers; they try to break the imprisoned women in every possible way. These include mock executions (...) Sexual violence is a weapon. The Russian occupiers use it not only against girls and women. (...) We heard how they abused and raped boys* [14]. There are strong accusations of the cruellest forms of humiliation and torture: *from "endless humiliation, screaming and intimidation" through "hitting, kicking and hitting, including hitting with various objects" to "the administration of electric shocks, cutting off fingers, sexual assault and rape, and then refusing medical assistance"* [72]. On the frame's periphery, an additional form of inflicting suffering should be located, which is the antisocial and violent behaviour of Russian soldiers returning from the front line. They have caused deep and painful wounds in the psyches of their loved ones: *there are reports of soldiers return-*

ing from the war telling about their behaviour towards their families and people outside the family. Murders, rapes, serious violent crimes (...) Raping, beating wives and girls, child abuse and everything related to it [7].

2. The **escape** frame (represented in the sample 23 times)

The structure of this frame is determined by three leading themes. The first is the evacuation of civilians: women, children, youths, pensioners and the elderly from the attacked Ukrainian cities and towns. The second is an incentive for men to return to the country, and Ukrainian legal regulations are intended to enforce this. The returning men are forced into the ranks of the Ukrainian army due to growing shortages. The third topic is cases of illegal crossing of borders by both Ukrainians and Russians to ensure a sense of security for themselves and their families or to avoid joining the army.

Civilian evacuations from threatened places are presented as necessary: *thousands of people have lost their homes and hundreds of others remain in the war zone without food, electricity, communication, and aid [87]*, dangerous and unprepared: *they are on their own [82]* and hampered by civilian indecision: *people refuse to leave because they claim it is their home and they have lived there all their lives. There are many elderly people among them. They are not ready to start life in a new place [85].*

The frame also identifies the problem of men of military age leaving the country, a qualitative change in the attitude towards the war and the obligation to fight for the homeland – from enthusiasm and long queues to reinforcement commands, including the loss of motivation to participate in the war: *After some time, when the “truth about the war” began to reach us, there was less of a desire to fight. In addition, my friends who are at the front told me: “Do everything not to end up here” [73].* The Russian side also has problems with people leaving the country *en masse*. *Russians are fleeing the country en masse – and many of them possess valuable skills [6]*, they are breaking the law and illegally purchasing passports and certificates enabling them to cross European borders: *Russians are trying at all costs to cope with the effects of the isolation of their country due to the war in Ukraine. They started buying fake Ukrainian passports and other documents on the illegal market [33].*

3. The **activity** frame (represented in the sample 27 times)

Adapting to the new war situation has taken on various forms, and one of the most important – as evidenced by a lot of Onet.pl material – were various activities undertaken by Ukrainians who did not accept a passive attitude. Characteristically, most examples of such active attitudes involve women.

Such forms of activity include, for example, documenting Russian aggression, Russian crimes, and the suffering of the civilian population: *I started making video reports and recording witnesses [15].* This emphasizes that world public opinion should be reliably informed about what is happening in Ukraine.

The frame highlights activities involving direct help provided to fighting soldiers, primarily psychological help, but also support for veterans, often permanently disabled and affected by post-traumatic stress syndrome. Civilian help for the army also involves conducting fundraisers and allocating part of the business income to the army: *We opened an account and started collecting donations for vehicles. Gradually, it turned into a systematic activity [15].* Some people rescue animals in areas where hostilities are taking place, others help evacuate people at risk and help them settle into new places, organise health care, education for children, language learning in case of going abroad, and help in finding a job.

These activities are most often carried out by volunteers. Orphaned children require special support. It is undertaken both by loved ones, meaning older siblings, and by strangers.

The activity frame also included many examples of Russian actions, such as in response to the war and taking the form of more or less open opposition. These include, for example, protest actions by women who demand contact with their husbands and sons conscripted into the Russian army and sent to the frontline, getting information about the missing, and seeking a reduction in service time: *The group was created the day after Putin announced his invasion of Ukraine. It became an important source of information for Russians opposed to the war. It encourages activism expressed in the form of protests* [27]. During the war, ethnic minority communities from remote regions of Russia also became more active, because their members were particularly often conscripted into the army. They also fight for their rights as minorities by organizing protests, providing legal assistance, and reaching out to global public opinion with information.

4. The **changed/other world** frame (represented in the sample 18 times)

A key component of this framework is the contrast between pre-war and wartime. *The war has changed everything. Global security norms and rules, priorities, and the direction in which the world is developing in the 21st century. It has also changed the lives of all Ukrainians* [15].

Representations of the pre-war world are dominated by images of happy families living in peaceful communities, with people working, developing, and making long-term plans for the future, accompanied by faith in justice and humanity. In fact, the only negative element mentioned in the analysed materials is the corruption widespread in Ukraine before the war. The war brings a radical change to the situation. Not only the depth, but also the suddenness of the change is strongly emphasized: *We led a quiet and happy life in Irpień, we worked, built a house, my daughter was preparing for school, and she dreamed of going to the first grade. Then the Russians instantly destroyed our quiet happiness* [15]. This was unexpected and surprising for most Ukrainians who were not prepared for it either physically, politically, or morally: *This war was like the end of the world for me. I had the feeling that my world had collapsed* [98].

The lives of thousands of people radically changed: they were forced to flee, emigrate, and abandon their previous living and working environments. They had to learn new professions, acquire new skills, form new habits and develop necessary personality traits. The war has deeply affected the sphere of interpersonal relationships, many families fell apart, and some of them lost those who died, emigrated or are fighting at the front. It made normal interpersonal contacts difficult or impossible and forced the need to build new ones. With the destruction of infrastructure, difficulties with provisions and the deregulation of the labour market, the standards of perceiving one's economic situation and the hierarchy of needs have also changed. Attitudes towards time have also undergone profound changes: *you cannot plan for the future, even short-term. Even plans for this month seem too far away* [84].

Particularly moving are the testimonies of the people most deeply affected by the war, meaning those arrested and tortured by the Russians, for whom the experience of captivity was an encounter with a completely different world: *I entered into a different world. I didn't understand how it was possible that just an hour ago I was a free person in my home, a respected and beloved wife, and now I was nobody* [14].

The materials also raise the problem of the possibility of returning to the lost state and some kind of rebuilding of everything that was destroyed by the war. The conclusions are rather negative: *I would love to have my former weakness, naivety, faith in justice and humanity. But it's impossible – life will never be the same as before the war broke out and I will never be the same again* [15]. It will also be impossible to rebuild Ukrainian-Russian relations, which have been devastated by the war.

5. The *clash of civilizations* frame (represented in the sample 19 times)

The frame of the clash of civilizations is expressed by sharply contrasting the Ukrainian and Russian nations and the societies of these countries. The basic features attributed to Russia and Russians are violence and cruelty. It is these features that are considered to be the causes of the war itself, the methods of conducting it and the treatment of the population in occupied areas, including prisoners of war. The Russians do not respect international law, they kill children and defenceless civilians, use terror and coercion, and destroy cities and Ukrainian culture.

The statements of Ukrainian citizens quoted in the texts emphasize the civilizational differences between Russia and Ukraine: *Russia is neither a civilizational promise nor a point of reference for Ukrainians. Today, the overwhelming majority of Ukrainian society chooses the West and its values, not the "Russian Mir"* [13]; *Unlike Russia, Ukraine will not destroy civilians' homes just to scare someone* [59]. Of the two warring states, only one can be classified as civilized, the other is a barbarian state.

Within this framework, Russia appears as the antithesis of everything that civilization entails: *Russians are a civilizational error. It cannot be explained otherwise. After all, people don't live like that, they don't do things like that* [59]. Russians live below civilized standards, but they agree to it in the name of imperialist myths: *Of course, its inhabitants are aware of the kind of country they live in. But any prospect of changing this state of affairs is associated in their minds with attachment to the status of a superpower. To maintain it, they are ready to support tools that do not fit into the categories of the civilized world* [13]. The cult that Russians have for Putin also distinguishes them from Ukrainians, who are generally critical of the government.

Such a sharp contrast between Ukrainian and Russian civilizations makes it pointless to seek any means of reconciling the warring societies. One cannot seek agreement with the enemy: *They will destroy our villages, even though they do not need to. Bastards. I hate them with all my heart and soul. I want them to burn in hell like our houses* [87]. The awareness of the threat posed by Russian barbarism should also be passed on to subsequent generations: *Children are most afraid of death. They do not yet understand that there are things worse than death – considering our "wonderful neighbour"* [93].

6. The *moral degradation* frame (represented in the sample 22 times)

The frame of moral degradation is used primarily to characterize Russia and Russians. Moral degradation, meaning the failure to respect basic ethical norms and contempt for the most important values as components of the picture of Russian society can be presented in two ways: either as universal, permanent features of Russianness, which the war only reveals, or as the effects of the war, which directly cause or intensify them.

Moral degradation treated as a permanent feature of Russians becomes an explanation for the brutal acts of Russian soldiers and the Russian administration in the occupied territories. Terror, violence, torture, murder of defenceless civilians, the bombing of hospitals and places where children are sheltered, looting and mass robberies – these are all

manifestations of this characteristic. Russians presented in this way cannot distinguish good from evil and are incapable of feeling higher feelings.

In the second case, it is emphasized that war is a peculiar time when many moral norms are suspended and killing is no longer an evil and condemnable act: *during war, violence becomes legitimized in society* [7]. Moral degradation can also be presented as a consequence of the specific treatment of former soldiers: *When Russian soldiers return from the front, they expect to be welcomed as heroes, with all honours. However, this does not always happen – they often receive their pensions late – if they receive them at all – or are perceived negatively by their neighbours, who often treat them as ordinary criminals or murderers. All this increases their bitterness and aggressiveness* [8].

Moral degradation is mostly attributed to Russian soldiers, many of whom have criminal records histories and who joined the army from prison. Sometimes the Russian authorities try to transform these criminals into war heroes. Some Russian circles and organizations are cited as particularly drastic examples of moral degradation. Such organizations include Rusich, a neo-Nazi militia whose members committed many crimes in the occupied territories of Ukraine, recorded them on video and published them on the Internet. They treated killing defenceless people as good fun: *“It was not a war crime because we are not military and we were having fun,” wrote members of the Rusich group under a photo showing one of its activists holding a severed head* [36].

The problem of moral decline very rarely concerns Ukrainians in the materials. If it does appear, it is in the context of the first moments after the outbreak of the war, remembered as a time of chaos and a breakdown of norms: *Among law enforcement officers there were also traitors who defected to the Russian side. I don’t even want to mention it. I’m ashamed that there are people like that. How can someone do such a thing? How can you betray your country, your mother?* [31].

7. The **women’s** frame (represented in the sample 33 times)

The women’s frame is mounted on three dominant pillars. The first concerns the dramatic fate of women, which consists of a series of difficult war entanglements, the second pillar refers to women’s activities in the spheres of family and social life, while the third deals with the physical, mental, and moral suffering of women resulting from traumatic war experiences.

Women are represented in family roles as wives, mothers, and grandmothers in professional roles such as journalists, doctors, actresses, volunteers, women doing men’s work, and as heroic soldiers. The war with its spectrum of difficult and painful experiences forces them to make various choices that change and deform their personalities from rather delicate to strong, decisive, and tough characters: *I have become more resistant to stress, I make quick decisions (...). This experience made me tough (...) if I had a choice, I wouldn’t want to go through all this. I want to be a weak woman who doesn’t have to do everything on her own* [15]. The elements of the content of this frame also present more optimistic stories, in which there is a subdued affirmation of the difficult war times: *a woman who travelled along the entire front line, a researcher who stayed in her hometown to make films, a media worker who now repairs cars. These are different stories, different feelings and experiences. But all our heroes have one thing in common: they have found a way to deal with the new reality, they want to live in Ukraine and believe in a happy and safe future* [15].

Women’s subjectivity and agency are signalled most strongly in the form of resourceful adaptation to difficult, wartime existential conditions and the organization of everyday,

ordinary life for themselves, their children, and relatives. This frame also includes content featuring protesting women, including the wives of Russian soldiers who are openly criticizing the war: *“Wives of the mobilized” is one of the strongest movements in Russia that harms Vladimir Putin. Initially, women mainly demanded the return of their husbands and sons from the front in Ukraine, but some women began to openly criticize the war and oppose Putin* [9]. The fate of some of them was tragic: *they disappeared without a trace. They were accused of “discrediting the Russian army,” treason and representing the West. They were sentenced to serving prison sentences* [3]. Yet, despite this, motivated and brave, they do not withdraw from the active fight for the return of their husbands from the war frontline, and what is more, they encourage others to take on such an attitude.

This frame is also filled with content about women’s physical and emotional suffering. The content about violent acts committed by Russian soldiers in the form of beatings, physical and mental torture and brutal rapes has a suggestive effect. The horrifying accounts were included in the Lemkin Centre’s report *“Sexual Violence of Russian Occupation Troops Against Ukrainian Women”* [14]. The frame also contains information about the overwhelming motherly pain of losing children: *I will remember the howling of a mother who has lost a child for the rest of my life* [29]. Inhuman suffering arouses negative emotions in women towards Russians: *I believe that shooting them makes them happy. I feel great hatred towards them* [30].

8. The **children’s** frame (represented in the sample 17 times)

The central point of this frame presents content emphasizing traumatic events resulting in death, physical and mental wounds, and orphanhood. The death of children, used as a *Russian military target* [24], is described sparingly, but eloquently and suggestively: *The fatalities included at least five children (...) The day before, they found the body of their mother, which included an eight-month-old baby* [24]. Children being orphaned is identified as a painful and lasting consequence of war: *Few people talk about what happens to children orphaned as a result of war, which includes bombings. Although it is difficult to determine their exact number, experts estimate that there may be thousands of them* [60]. The loss of one’s parents, especially mothers, is strongly associated with the mental and physical pain of children and adolescents: *I still feel sad, I think about my mother, and I cry a lot. I wish she were still here* [60]. *I tried to save her (...) Mom lay down and I sat down next to her (...) Mom was lying on her side. Her last words were: “I’m fine, don’t worry”* [37].

Additionally, the consequences of orphanhood are reported, leaving a lasting mark on children’s psyches: (...) *Ukrainian students complain to psychologists about anxiety, “separation from family,” panic, dementia and “suicidal tendencies.” They talk about their “fear of loud sounds” and “plane noise,” “mourning,” depression and “separation anxiety”* [55]. This frame is also formed by the determination of older siblings and their fight to prevent their younger sisters and brothers from ending up in an orphanage: *A brave older brother spent months fighting for the right to take care of his sisters and brothers. When he received it, he was only 18 years old* [37].

A prominent element of the frame is content about the fate of children deported from Ukraine. The topic is described extensively, citing collected evidence and information about Russian government programs for the mass adoption of Ukrainian children. Some expressions highlight this: *treating Ukraine as a valuable human resource* [13]; *a method of population robbery* [13]; and *a carefully thought-out plan by the Kremlin* [55].

The frame's content elements also identify the problem of combat stress syndrome in fathers and its psychological implications on children: *it includes depression, anxiety disorders, and borderline personality disorders* [7].

Conclusions and discussion

On the one hand, we treated social representations as semantic constructs describing and conceptualizing the war experiences of individual people, and, on the other, as certain cognitive matrices imposing a specific image of reality, both on the individual and collective dimensions. The analysis of selected journalist materials from the Onet.pl website published in the first half of 2024 provided several examples of naming and thematically anchoring individual experiences of the reality of war to embed them in the minds of recipients. Eight dominant interpretative frames were revealed for building representations of civilians' experiences of the war reality (according to incidence): the suffering frame, women's frame, activity frame, escape frame, moral degradation frame, changed/other world frame, clash of civilizations frame, and children's frame. Their frequency and exposure shape the recipients' specific ways of perceiving the war experiences of civilian victims, as well as war in general. The reconstructed media frames indicate editorial and journalistic choices of specific content, their multiplication and exposure, and, on the other hand, omitting others, in order to provide the desired image of the conflict. On the Onet.pl portal, there is a noticeable general tendency to strengthen the positive image of Ukraine (the role of the victim, the accreditation function in retaliatory activities) and a second tendency to strengthen the negative image of Russia (the discrediting role of the brutal aggressor, the cruel enemy). Our findings confirm the results known from other empirical studies (Fengler *et al.* 2018, Szwed 2016, Szulich-Kałuża, 2016, 2018, Cassidy 2023, Wilson *et al.* 2023). The bias in the selection of content and the high emotionality characteristic of messages concerning difficult experiences of war terror allow us to conclude that the frames adopted by Onet.pl journalists do not stimulate morally neutral attitudes aimed at peaceful resolution of the conflict (Peleg 2006). They rather offer a specific position, where the aggressor and the victim are clearly indicated.

The distinguished detailed topoi of the interpretative frames, especially the most relevant ones, are filled with content adapted in form to the language of the conflict (strong emotional saturation – in the suffering frame, one-sided perception of the parties to the conflict – in the escape frame and clash of civilisations frame, victimization – in the suffering frame and the moral degradation frame, exaggeration and overstatement – in most frames), fill the patterns of social representations, which can be treated as social practices of a semiotic nature, enabling interpretations or experiences of war. The analysed texts focus primarily on the experiences of the Ukrainian population, while the experiences of Russians are taken into account much less often. Broadly speaking, Ukrainians are presented as victims of Russian aggression, terror, and war crimes. Relatively often, journalists present the experiences of women and children, which highlights the significant role of gender-based violence as one of the dimensions of the Russian-Ukrainian war (Zavorodko, 2023). Many of the experiences described are very drastic and difficult to imagine, but their veracity is proven by the fact that these are first-hand stories. This raises certain ethical issues for both journalists and recipients, but it also allows audiences to better understand the dangers of war (Syvakivskyi & Krupskyi, 2023). The moral dimension is

extremely important for the identified representations of experiences describing the reality of war, as it directs the way of perceiving war and its consequences for ordinary people.

The presented study certainly does not exhaust the undertaken topic. Our research is exploratory in nature, opening up a number of contexts that can constitute a horizon of reference for further scientific research into the personal war experiences of ordinary people and their media representations.

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Appendix

The Appendix contains all cited sources from the Onet.pl portal. The numbering comes from the original corpus of materials.

- 3 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/wojna-rosji-w-ukrainie-rosjanki-coraz-bardziej-wsciekle-na-wladimira-putina/0r0kr93>
- 6 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/najwiekszy-sekret-kremla-rosyjska-profesor-ros-janie-sa-wsciekli/trysg45>
- 7 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/maja-dosc-zycia-w-piekle-rosjanie-wraca-ja-z-frontu-i-terroryzuja-rodakow/vdys982>
- 8 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/strach-na-rosyjskich-ulicach-moga-cie-zabic-nie-patrz-im-w-oczy/rvp40sc>
- 9 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/rosyjska-policja-aresztuje-dziennikarzy-na-pro-tescie-zon/lg3zhhg>
- 11 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/plakalismy-nasze-miasto-przestalo-istniec-podc-zas-walk-o-mariupol-zginelo-co-najmniej/z655ysl>
- 13 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/marcin-ogdowski-mowi-o-sukce-sie-ukrainy-juz-wygrala-niepodleglosc/xdqrwzl>
- 14 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/nie-jestes-kobieta-jestes-ukropka-raport-o-gwal-tach-rosyjskiej-armii/e0rd026> – materiał dla dorosłych
- 15 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/cztery-historie-z-ukrainy-prawie-nie-pamietam-jak-to-bylo-zyc-razem-z-mezem/2m0mnql>
- 24 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/rosja-wykorzystuje-nowa-strategie-w-ukrain-ie-oto-z-kim-walczą-te-bestie/2gm4v7d>
- 27 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/politico/rosjanki-wsciekle-na-putina-wladze-postrzega-ja-kobiety-jako-zagrozenie/f136re5>
- 30 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/mieszkali-w-mariupolu-na-ich-domu-pojawil-sie-napis-tu-jest-trup/qyervw8>
- 36 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/nazywaja-sie-nazistami-i-wzywa-ja-do-masowych-mordow-kreml-ma-nowy-problem/gyr1k2w>
- 37 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/19-latek-z-ukrainy-opiekuje-sie-rodzenstwem-rosyjskie-bomby-zabily-matke/xjwntvz>
- 55 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/porwanie-ukrainskich-dzieci-to-pocza-tek-planu-kremla-teraz-pierze-im-mozgi/m5hebwj>
- 58 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/przezylam-rosyjska-okupacje-buczy-szczatki-by-ly-zeskrobywane-ze-scian/798417p>
- 59 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/switlana-oleszko-ostro-o-rosjanach-to-nie-narod/k2rd03s>

- 60 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/duzo-placze-chcialbym-zeby-tu-byla-tym-dzieciom-wojna-putina-zniszczyla-zycie/tedd0j7>
- 72 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/skala-bestialstwa-rosyjskich-tortur-w-ukrainie-to-horror-nowy-raport/qhd8z5d>
- 73 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/ukraincy-zdradzaja-czemu-nie-chca-walczyc-jestes-wysylany-na-rzez/ljy3fc4>
- 82 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/ka-jestesmy-rosja-czy-nie-relacja-z-ostrzeliwane-go-miasta-w-rosji/rtjf6z5>
- 84 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/jestesmy-wyczerpani-zaplakani-ale-zahartowani-nadszarpniety-duch-ukrainy/qd2lpdw>
- 85 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/jak-wyglada-zycie-pod-ciaglym-ostrzalem-ze-100-domow-ponad-90-jest-pustych/ljhpkk3>
- 87 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/charkow-i-okolice-pod-ostrzalem-rosjan-dranie-nienawidze-ich/pyey3z1>
- 93 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/ukrainska-zolnierka-zdradza-najwiekszy-problem-sil-kijowa-jak-w-plonacym-domu/gxpnhm6>
- 98 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/rozmowa-z-uchodzcami-mowilam-ze-to-przeciez-nie-moze-byc-o-moich-rodakach/w3vjgcv>