

Lives Punctuated by War: Civilian Volunteers and Identity Formation amidst the Donbas War in Ukraine

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Abstract

This dissertation examines civilian mobilization amidst the Donbas war in Ukraine and the identity formation processes that it engendered. It focuses on ordinary residents of the frontline regions who voluntarily got together to address the humanitarian and military consequences of war in the absence of state support. It explores the micro-level dynamics of mobilization, particularly the demographic profile of volunteers, their motivations to join and their pathways to engagement. In so doing, it provides an account of how ordinary residents of seemingly passive regions became active in times of crisis. I use the concept of “identity formation” to analyze how war and war engagement have impacted citizen, gender, national and language identities of those active at the rear. The outbreak of war shattered habitual ways of thinking and acting and brought about new modes of belonging and meaning making for war volunteers. My findings suggest that successful volunteer efforts in wartime allowed volunteers to position themselves differently with respect to community, nation, and the state and to articulate new understandings of “good citizenship.” The shifting positioning of volunteers, as the research demonstrates, is inherently linked to the changing citizen regimes in Ukraine and the gendered conceptions of who counts as a legitimate member of the community. By employing ethnographic tools of inquiry, the dissertation provides an ethnographic account of wartime social change “from below” and speaks to larger social and political transformations in wartime using Ukraine as a case study. It does so with attention to the social-political environment within which collective action occurs and in relation to the new types of mobility, socializing and bonding it engenders.

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Chapter 1. Civilian engagement and identity formation in wartime

In December 2013, as we got together for a Christmas party hosted by the Chair of Ukrainian Studies, many conversations centered on the growing protests in Ukraine. A few weeks earlier, President Victor Yanukovich had refused to sign a free trade association agreement with the European Union, a decision that dissatisfied many and brought some, primarily young people, into the streets to protest. The subsequent brutal police beatings of the protesters generated a great deal of outrage, mobilizing many Ukrainians to condemn violence, protest the impunity of the police and demand respect for their rights and just treatment. The “Revolution of Dignity,” a name coined for the initial EuroMaidan protests, was gaining sway in Ukraine, accompanied by hope for a better future. In the midst of our discussion, my supervisor suggested that I go to Ukraine to observe “the making of history” with my own eyes and conduct some ethnographic research for the Chair. I welcomed the suggestion, and three days later I was on a plane heading to Kyiv.

My first encounter with the protest started before I reached Maidan Square – the center of mass mobilization in Kyiv. On my way there, a stranger confronted me at the subway station to talk about the protests. Pro-Maidan ribbons on my coat unmistakably indicated where my loyalties lay. It became clear right away that my interlocutor did not share my enthusiasm for the protests. He talked at great length about the dangers of destabilising Ukraine and breaking down “the system.” He insisted that if the protesters kept “idling on the streets” and preventing the state from performing its functions, “the East” would rise up to put an end to it, turning Ukraine into a place of violence and bloodshed.¹ It was the first time I had heard anyone talk about the pending

¹ The “East” refers to Eastern Ukraine, primarily to industrial Donbas (Donets’k and Luhans’k oblasts), that have a distinctive history and a strong regional identity.

possibility of a civil war in Ukraine. The encounter caught me off guard and left me dumbfounded. The concerns about “bloodshed” and “violence” seemed absurd, paranoid and groundless. I shook this encounter off, not being able to imagine anything like that happening in Ukraine.

I was quickly disabused of my naiveté. Although the protests began peacefully, violence was increasingly used on Maidan after police beatings. Frequent police-led attacks, intimidation, torture and abductions compelled activists to create a security force on Maidan square with barricades and quasi-militarised self-defence regiments. The government’s unwillingness to seriously consider the demands of the protestors and its continuous attempts to dismiss them aggravated the situation. The tensions escalated and turned lethal for the first time in mid-January 2014, when the Ukrainian Parliament adopted legislation, known as “dictatorship” or “anti-protest” laws, to ban public demonstrations and restrict free speech. These decisions antagonised the protesters, with some resorting to physical attacks on the police, throwing pavement bricks, fireworks and Molotov cocktails at them. Three activists were shot dead during these confrontations, leading to an increased openness to violence by the protesters (Halling and Stewart 2015) and their failure to distance themselves from the tactics of radical groups (Ishchenko 2016).

These events paved the way for the subsequent and deadlier confrontations. On 18 February 2014, the Parliament resumed session ostensibly to vote on and restore the 2004 Constitution, one of the main demands by protesters, who saw this as a necessary step to curtail presidential powers and create space for political resolution of the unrest. The parliamentary session reached an impasse when the Speaker refused to permit the vote. This political misconduct was met with frustration and a “peaceful offensive” on Parliament (Kudelia 2016). The march, however, was led by self-defence regiments with some belonging to right-wing radical parties. Some members resorted to attacks on internal troops in the government quarters. Response

followed immediately, with a full-scale police assault on the protesters. The ensuing three-day clashes resulted in bloodshed. The count of casualties mounted to over a hundred protesters and a dozen policemen, with many more injured. Protester casualties were allegedly caused by government snipers who were deployed on Maidan. The outcome was the ousting of Yanukovich and his subsequent escape to Russia. Unrest continued to simmer across the country, but the removal of Yanukovich gave a sense of a hard-won victory to the Maidaners. It was a relief.

The unpredictability of ensuing events shocked many. In the days following the flight of Yanukovich, Russia annexed Crimea. Russian special forces seized the main government buildings on the peninsula in late February 2014. Under the surveillance of Russian troops, the Crimean Parliament appointed a new Prime Minister from a far-right Russian nationalist party and called for a vote on Crimea's annexation to Russia (Arel and Driscoll 2015). "Little green men" - Russian soldiers in unmarked green army uniforms – blockaded most military bases in Crimea and Crimean Parliament in Simferopol. An illegal referendum on the status of Crimea was held on 18 March 2014, finalizing the annexation of the peninsula. Since then, Crimea has been administered as a de-facto Russian subject. As a result, "many pro-Ukraine activists, journalists, officials as well as Crimean Tatars, an important ethnic minority in the peninsula, fled Crimea out of fear or because of threats, intimidation and discrimination on account of their ethnicity or political opinions" (IDMC 2015).²

In the meantime, there was rising instability on Donbas, Eastern Ukraine. Many in the region contested the legitimacy of the new Ukrainian government and claimed that it illegally ascended to power through a coup d'état on Maidan. Russia presented a narrative that the interim

² The estimates of internally displaced from Crimea vary. The State Emergency Service reports that 20,000 fled Crimea in 2014 (State Emergency Service quoted in IDMC Report 2015). The NGO Crimean Diaspora estimates that between 50,000 and 60,000 people have left Crimea, although not all are registered (Crimea Diaspora cited in IDMC Report 2015).

Ukrainian government was “a fascist junta”, encouraging anti-government sentiments on Donbas to take root and grow. The sudden implosion of the Yanukovich-led “Party of Regions” led to a power vacuum in the region and created an opening for militant grassroots mobilization (Arel and Driscoll 2015). Starting in early March, unarmed and armed separatists seized and occupied regional administrations, security service, and police headquarters on Donbas. Russian nationalists, including former Russian intelligence officers, arrived from Russia via Crimea and spearheaded these efforts. Local police and security services did not resist or even openly supported them (Kudelia 2016). In May 2014, with support from local authorities, the separatists held a referendum on self-determination, creating the so-called “Donets’k People’s Republic” (DNR) and “Luhans’k People’s Republic” (LNR) (see Map 1:376). The image of a “republic” became symbolically important for many people in the region who felt rejected after the Maidan protests (Kudelia 2016).³ Russian involvement at this stage was indirect and mostly consisted of supplies and weapon provision to separatists (Katchanovski 2016). In August 2014, Russia directly intervened on Donbas, bringing several regular battalions to strengthen the separatists (Kudelia 2016; Katchanovski 2016).

The instability also engulfed Eastern and Southern Ukraine. The narratives of “re-establishing Novorossiia,” a historical-geopolitical region that covered Eastern and Southern Ukraine during the Russian empire in the 19th century, greatly contributed to regional insecurities. There were attempts to create a “Kharkiv Republic” and an “Odesa Republic” echoing the attempt on Donbas. Pro-Russia sentiments were palpable across the region. In early March, Odesa saw a pro-Russian rally numbering over 10,000 people. Within days, a Russian flag was erected on the

³ By August 2015 more centralized civilian “administrative structures” emerged including a “legislature”, a “judiciary system”, “ministries” and “law enforcement” in the DNR and LNR with the “republics” managing their affairs separately from the Ukrainian state (OUNHC 2015).

building of the oblast state administration with the complicity of local police. Similar tensions simmered in Kharkiv. Concerns in the city were heightened by perceptions of the ambivalence and betrayal of local police forces as some overtly sided with the separatists (Field Notes Odesa and Kharkiv 2015).

Anxieties were exacerbated by the threat of Russia's incursion into the border regions. Rumours of a buildup of Russian troops were rampant. Sources reported as many as 40,000 troops close to the Ukrainian border, ready for an "incursion" (Croft 2014a). Russia also launched military exercises near the border regions, heightening the anxiety of invasion. The geographical proximity of Kharkiv, located only a few kilometers from the Russian border, and of Odesa, positioned near the Russia-controlled Transnistria and Crimea, alarmed residents of these regions. The situation in Dnipropetrovs'k was similar, as it borders the Donbas region and is in close proximity to the contact line.⁴ Commenting on the situation at the time, NATO top military commander framed it as "incredibly concerning" and stated that Russia could achieve a Ukraine incursion in 3-5 days (Croft 2014b).

Three months after my unsettling subway encounter in Kyiv, Russia's annexation of Crimea was complete, violence on Donbas had broken out, instability engulfed Eastern and Southern regions and Russia's invasion was a viable possibility. In response to these dramatic developments, the Ukrainian government announced military mobilization in April 2014 to contain the spread of the separatist forces and regain control on Donbas. By August 2015, over 200,000 men were called to take up arms and fight for the territorial integrity of the Ukrainian state. Volunteer fighting battalions rapidly emerged to assist with the military efforts. The National

⁴ In May 2016 the city of Dnipropetrovs'k was renamed Dnipro by the Ukrainian Parliament resolution as part of decommunization effort. In my dissertation, I refer to it as Dnipropetrovs'k, since it was the official name at the time of my fieldwork.

Guard was re-established with extensive civilian support networks. This large-scale military mobilization was happening in an environment of disorientation, anxiety and, on a more practical note, a profound shortage of resources.

This military mobilization was also rather peculiar in nature. The government called it an “Anti-Terrorist Operation” (ATO) with various labels, such as “separatists” and “terrorists,” used for the opposing side. Many academics and Western commentators referred to it as “the Ukraine Crisis” (Mearsheimer 2014; Ukraine Crisis 2014, 2018, 2018b). Some called it a “civil war,” emphasizing the presence of territorial Ukrainians on both sides of the conflict and the significance of Ukraine’s domestic cleavages to the war on Donbas (Arel and Driscoll 2015; Kudelia 2016; Katchanovski 2016). Others felt uncomfortable with these definitions, stressing the pivotal role of the Russian military in steering violence on Donbas. They described the violence as “acts of war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine” (Case 2016) or simply “Russia’s war against Ukraine.” According to a 2015 Razumkov Center poll, this understanding was shared by close to 70 percent of Ukrainians (71 protsentov 2015) who saw Russia as the occupier and aggressor.⁵ Russia, however, has continuously denied its official presence in Ukraine, deflating available evidence and framing the Donbas conflict as instigated by the post-Maidan Ukrainian government (Walker 2015).⁶

With no easy way to define the new reality, Ukraine was forced to face it. By August 2015, over 1.4 million individuals were displaced, mostly from the densely populated Donbas

⁵ According to the 2015 Razumkov poll, 32% of Ukrainians regard the war on Donbas as a separatist rebellion conducted with Russia’s assistance. 28% think that this is a war between Russia and Ukraine; 16% believe that this is a civil war; 8% consider it a war between Russia and the US and 7% are convinced that this is a fight for LNR and DNR independence (Pochti tret’ ukrainsev 2015). The conflicting narratives persist in Ukraine.

⁶ Russia was recognized as “aggressor state” by the Ukrainian Parliament only four years into the war, in a January 2018 vote (Ukraine crisis 2014).

region and from Crimea (IDMC 2015; see Map 2: 376).⁷ The high displacement rate swiftly put Ukraine among the countries with the largest displacement populations in the world (Pikulicka-Wilczewska 2017). The situation was exacerbated by the fact that most of these individuals belonged to socially vulnerable categories, with high numbers of pensioners, children and disabled persons (Wenerski et al. 2018).⁸ The number of individuals injured climbed close to 18,000 (OHCHR 2015).⁹ The war in the Donbas has also claimed close to 9,000 civilian and combatant lives as of August 2015 (OHCHR 2015). Concerns about crossing checkpoints, clearing landmines and surviving shelling became part of everyday life for the residents of the Donbas region. Ukrainian leaders found themselves expected to deal with the enormous humanitarian and military consequences of war.

Ordinary civilians rapidly came to the rescue. Some got together to fundraise, procure and provide for those on the frontlines. A multitude of volunteer networks mushroomed in the “rear” to take care of soldiers, war veterans, and those injured or displaced from their homes. Committees of mothers, wives and sisters began to support soldiers and their families, help them get through traumatic experiences and advocate for their rights. An immense collective

⁷ I mostly use the figures from summer of 2015 when my fieldwork took place to give a better understanding of the challenges faced by Ukrainian state officials and ordinary citizens at that time. The highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) aggregated in government-controlled areas of Donbas with Donetsk accommodating 539,547 and Luhans'k 213,758. Eastern regions of Ukraine accommodated three quarters of the IDP population with Kharkiv accepting 186,674 and Dnipropetrovs'k 72,391 (IDMC 2015). Odesa accepted a smaller number of IDPs (30,800), but hosted the majority of disabled persons and orphans, the categories who required additional care and funds (UNHCR 2015). In comparison, Western regions accommodated lower numbers of IDPs, with Lviv sheltering 10,000, Volyn 3,700 and Ternopil 2,700 (UNHCR 2015). What these numbers may suggest is that most able and active people who left the warzone did not register as IDPs.

⁸ According to the estimates provided by the Ministry of Social Policy in December 2017, pensioners constitute 52 percent of the total IDP population in Ukraine (771,000 individuals). The number of those with a disability amounts to 49,800 people and the number of children is 227,400 (IDP Report 2018). These numbers indicate that over one million IDPs do not belong to the active labour force.

⁹ The number of injured in 2017 exceeded 20,000 individuals and the number of casualties reached over 10,000 (OHCHR 2017). These estimates are not complete and may be under-reporting the actual number of casualties given gaps in coverage of certain geographic areas and time periods (ibid). The 2015 estimate of casualties includes 7,883 people killed and 1,200 missing, most of which are believed to be dead (UHCHR 2015).

undertaking was underway in Ukraine to strengthen its faltering military capacity and mitigate the humanitarian costs of the war. The assemblage of networks in Ukraine later became known as a “volunteer movement,” with an emphasis on the voluntary and collective nature of engagement.

Mainstream accounts interpreted these collective volunteer efforts as an upsurge of patriotism. Commentators suggested that the political and military upheaval – first and foremost Russia’s aggression towards Ukraine – had “united” Ukrainians and generated a sense of loyalty to the Ukrainian state (Thoburn 2014; Motyl 2015). Marking International Volunteer Day, a coordinator of a volunteer center and a professor at Dnipropetrovs’k University summarized this sentiment: “Today, at a time when Ukraine faces acute domestic and international challenges, the issue of volunteering and patriotism became an indication of our humanity, morality and civility. The terms “volunteering” and “patriotism” have come to be understood as synonyms, as an organic part of today’s socio-political life that embodies arguably the highest duty of our time” (Bondarenko 2015). Statements like this suggest that the general understanding of volunteering in Ukraine is that of a “civil society” mobilization that stems from and is sustained by patriotism in response to Russia’s aggression. This explanation, however, masks the diverse reasons for volunteer engagement in wartime and, more importantly, blinds us to the complex individual and social transformations that unfolded as a result of it.

In the summer of 2015, I travelled to Eastern and Southern Ukraine to conduct fieldwork and had a chance to observe some of these transformations first hand. For many people I talked to, war signified a fracture with previous ways of life. Dalia, a lawyer from Odesa who did not participate in the Maidan protests and called herself “disengaged” prior to war, created a network that would later become “a kitchen battalion,” with women getting together daily to cook food and send it to the front. She quit legal practice to fully devote herself to the war effort in summer 2014.

A year and a half later, she was appointed head of the regional administration in Odesa and selected a demobilized volunteer fighter as her deputy. This newly forged war friendship evolved into a professional cooperation where both sought to improve the responsiveness of the state administration to the needs of region residents. Iryna, a teacher of English language and literature, became preoccupied with locating missing combatants and ensuring that their bodies were returned to their families in the aftermath of the Battle of Ilovaisk.¹⁰ She was still planning to return to her professional duties, but at the time of our encounter, she was completely subsumed by her war commitments to soldiers and their families. Ivan, working in the IT sector, was conscripted to serve in the army in spring 2014. He had never been interested in political and social issues prior to that, as he recalled. A year later, after his demobilization, he did not see himself going back to his previous life. Instead, he got busy helping war veterans adjust to peaceful life and ensure that they could access the entitlements conferred on them by the state. Oksana, a 36-year-old woman from Odesa, owned a family business. She sold her business after the war broke out and spent the money to help those at the front. After her husband joined the National Guard as a volunteer fighter, she became affiliated with his regiment as a civilian volunteer and took care of the social issues of combatants. Stories like these are numerous. They point to the profound rerouting of personal trajectories amidst war.

It was not just the professional occupations of individuals that were altered. New forms of sociality and solidarity developed around war experiences. With the coherence and predictability of life compromised, many searched for and found new ways of meaning making, acting, bonding and relating to others. Some indicated to me that their social circles had profoundly changed, with old friendships dissolving and new ones emerging. War ties were strong and

¹⁰ The Battle of Ilovaisk started on 7 August 2014. It resulted in the encirclement of the Ukrainian forces by insurgents and Russian military troops for days leading to the death of hundreds of Ukrainian soldiers.

meaningful to those I encountered during my fieldwork. Through reshaped social relations, new communities were created and enlivened, helping people find the resilience required to cope with trauma. The changed social milieu of those engaged in the war effort affected the ways they related to others and how they saw their role in society. Many people I talked to indicated that they had strengthened their identification with the nation and the state. The war affected their sense of belonging and made them think differently about their behaviors, roles and responsibilities. Ultimately, it impacted their sense of self in multiple and complex ways, fusing new forms of identification with ethical underpinnings that grew out of war realities.

Oddly enough, while causing disruptions, war seemed to have helped some regain a sense of “normalcy,” a return to things as they “should be.” This was particularly noticeable in my conversations with female volunteers when they talked about their camaraderie with the combatants. Two examples illustrate this. One female volunteer noted that war changed the status of men and women in society, engaging both in their “initially intended roles”:

Women became appreciated not as draught horses, housemaids and men became valued not as breadwinners. Those men who have been at war see women differently, as goddesses. The same goes for men. Their status has risen immensely. Men became men and women became women, and finally we are moving away from the stupid unhealthy feminism that has been forced on us for God knows what reasons. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs’k, 12 August 2015)

I was taken aback by this comment and the fact that female engagement in wartime has not been interpreted in any sense as a feminist practice, but rather as a move away from it. Another volunteer echoed this sentiment, saying that there are a lot of women in the voluntary movement, “because we [women] support men. This is what women are supposed to do... It’s normal that the man carries on war and the woman provides for him. This is a normal natural process” (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs’k, 14 August 2015). These displays of gender essentialism and the strong moral

charge of what is good and right point to shifts in gender ideologies. While seemingly “unimportant,” these shifting understandings of gender roles and responsibilities orient people towards certain actions and possibilities, holding the potential to dislodge established patterns of authority and politics.

Fusing my personal entanglements in the war with my intellectual pursuits, I decided to study the ways individuals change their ways of relating to others, reinterpret their own role in society and inject meaning back into their life amidst war. The result is this dissertation. In it, I focus on the processes of identity formation unleashed by war. More specifically, I seek to construct an account of the processes through which national, gender and citizen identities of civilian volunteers are being renegotiated amidst war and wartime engagement. The main question the dissertation addresses is the following: How did civilians at the rear mobilize amidst war and how have warfare and war engagement impacted their gender, national, language and citizen identities? The genesis of this dissertation, thus, is a curiosity about the ways societies mobilize in wartime and how this mobilization impacts the identities of those involved in the war effort. More specifically, I focus on the civilian volunteers who got together to address the military and humanitarian consequences of the war in Ukraine. By looking at the civilian volunteers who mobilized in Eastern and Southern Ukraine – Kharkiv, Odesa and Dnipropetrovs’k - to assist combatants and internally displaced persons, I place the experiences of ordinary Ukrainians at the center of my critical analysis.

Conceptual and methodological limitations of scholarship on collective action in wartime

Earlier studies have found a link between wars and collective mobilization. Studying the decline in civic engagement in the US over the last few decades, Putnam (2001) attributes lower levels of participation to the gradual replacement of people who came of age before and

during World War II. He notes that “World War II occasioned a massive outpouring of patriotism and collective solidarity. At war’s end those energies were redirected into community life. The two decades following 1945 witnessed one of the most vital periods of community involvement in American history” (Putnam 2001: 14). Putnam attributes the decline of civil society participation in the US with a gradual replacement of the World War generation. Similar effects of war were noted by Skocpol, Munson, Karch, and Camp (2002), who extended Putnam’s argument to show that civic engagement spurted rapidly during and immediately after all major US wars. These studies point to war as a powerful force for social change and collective engagement. One of their shortcomings, however, is that they do not elaborate on the processes of wartime mobilization itself and what is it about wars that make collective solidarities long-lasting and profound. My study contributes to this literature by exploring the dynamics of wartime mobilization at the rear and examining what types of connections are forged through war engagement and why. By doing so, I intend to explain what makes war-forged communities so meaningful to those engaged and what implications it has for shifting gender, national, language and citizen regimes in the country.

This analysis is also sparked by a curiosity to understand how seemingly passive societies mobilize amidst war. The existing literature on collective action in wartime emphasize the importance of pre-existing networks for wartime mobilization. Looking at the favourable impact of great wars on civic volunteerism in the United States, Skocpol, Munson, Karch, and Camp (2002) recognize that the abundance of membership organizations in times of peace served as a basis for further mobilization during war. New associations evolved and grew around the existing ones, fuelled by the skills of civic leaders and government support. Kage (2010) makes a similar observation, analysing the causes of the postwar growth in civic engagement in Japan. Pre-war structures of participation, she argues, influenced the availability of opportunities for civic

engagement by shaping the costs of association-building and information-gathering (Kage 2010). The importance of pre-existing networks for mass mobilization has been noted in other contexts too, with Boin and Bynander (2015) looking at the role of pre-existing networks in efficient crisis management and Bosco (2001) discussing their significance for collective action more generally.

The developments in Eastern and Southern Ukraine pose a challenge to this body of scholarship. Over the last two decades, Ukraine has consistently been marked as a country with low levels of associational life. The World Value Survey, a large-scale comparative study of more than 50 states, ranked Ukraine among the three countries with the lowest levels of participation and organizational capacity, even among post-communist states (Howard 2002a; 2002b). This ranking was based on the average number of organizational memberships per person in nine types of groups, including non-political associations, political, professional, recreational and charitable organizations. Within Ukraine, the Eastern and Southern regions were classified as pervasively passive and incapable of collective action (Birch 2000). The rapid mushrooming of volunteer networks in Odesa, Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovs'k, the sites of my research, is puzzling as these regions allegedly had no infrastructure for successful civilian mobilization. By looking at the dynamics of engagement in cities bordering the war zone, this dissertation examines the genesis of collective action in communities previously considered disengaged and examines how seemingly “latent” societies mobilize during wartime. To do so, I examine the extent to which civilian volunteers were engaged prior to war, their understanding of citizen duty back then, their pathways to engagement in wartime and motives to join volunteer networks. This allows me to construct an account of how civilian mobilization in wartime unfolds and what realities/considerations underpin it.

An important theoretical insight of the scholarship on collective action in wartime pertains to the cooperation between citizens and the government. Scrutinizing the state / society relations during America's major wars, such as the Civil War and World War I, and probing the cases of smaller conflicts, such as the Spanish American War and the war in Vietnam, Skocpol, Munson, Karch, and Camp (2002) demonstrate that government is central in civic engagement for a number of reasons. By and large, it provides the institutional setting within which voluntary groups operate and conduct their activities. In addition, supportive actions of the government enable civic groups to increase the outreach and productivity of their efforts, eventually allowing them to grow very large. Data on membership participation, it is argued, indicate that big spikes in civic participation during wars go hand in hand with official partnerships with the government. Thus, the literature emphasizes the "institutional synergy" between the state and society whereby civilian engagement during wartime is woven into the institutional fabric of the state and shaped by government decisions.

The Ukrainian case cannot be neatly explained by these scholarly findings. Ukrainian state capacities have been considerably constrained since independence because of the economic, political and social challenges the state has faced. The war on Donbas exposed Ukraine's limited state capacity and tested it on a new level.¹¹ The Ukrainian state found itself trying to cope with mass displacement and social unrest, simultaneously engaging in the military action. Civilian mobilization unfolded sporadically, often autonomously from the state, with individuals getting together to assist the army and internally displaced individuals. State/society relations during war in Ukraine cannot be understood through institutional synergy between state and non-state actors. Studying the environment within which war volunteers operated and the resources and networks

¹¹ Ukraine lost 20 percent of the Ukrainian economy due to Russia's annexation of Crimea and the uprising on Donbas within the first year of war (Croft 2014c).

that they drew on is necessary to understand how collective action gains sway amidst limited state capacity not consolidated statehood as was the case in the United States. Such a study helps us to comprehend how societies mobilize in wartime without institutional “embeddedness” or formal partnerships with the government.

Another limit of this scholarship is that it treats collective action in wartime as “civil society” engagement. The “civil society” concept has a strong normative connotation of broader engagement that is inclusive and promotes democratic values. Labelling wartime collective action “civil society” engagement is analytically lacking, as it fails to capture the diverse scope of engagement in wartime and its potentially contradictory nature. Recent critical scholarship on problematized the celebration of any type of engagement as inherently good and “civil”, pointing to various problematic aspects of it. Particularly, Chambers and Kopstein (2001) differentiate between democratic civility – engagement aimed at inclusion and built on reciprocity and particularist civility – engagement oriented towards helping only some people deemed as worthy, often at the expense of others. In the context of Ukraine and Eastern Europe, the concept of civil society has been critiqued for being vague and contradictory. In this regard, Stepanenko (2006) notes that “civil society” became a new mantra of political elites with many adopting it in Ukraine to promote own ideological beliefs and political interests. Similarly, speaking about Russia and Eastern Europe, Hemment (2012) states that “civil society” is not an objective reality. It represents a political symbol that can be mobilized and instrumentalized for various ends. These and other critiques point to the analytically lacking quality of the concept to capture complex societal and political transformations and urge us to diversify our conceptual vocabulary when dealing with civilian mobilization.

The “civil society” lens is specifically lacking when dealing with wartime realities as it masks various problematic aspects of wartime participation. There is a body of literature that emphasizes how “civil society” can be conducive to the rise of anti-democratic tendencies. Particularly, critical military scholars demonstrate that civilian participation in wartime can lead to the militarisation of society at large as civilians embrace, normalize and popularize militaristic values publicly and produce discourses that elevate the status of the military (Enloe 1983; Cohn and Enloe 2003; Enloe 2016). The celebration of the military can endow it with political legitimacy and decision-making powers beyond the constraints of the battlefield. The accompanying tendency is the marginalization of women from politics, with their relegation to supporting roles (Enloe 1983; Sjolander and Cornut 2016) and the rise of authoritarianism (Giroux 2016; Schwalbe 2012). Analytically, the concept of civil society blinds us to these processes and does not allow to critically engage with the types of collective action emerging in wartime and possibly exclusionary solidarities that arise out of war.

Decentering the narratives of “civil society” and “patriotism” and focusing instead on identity formation processes helps us illuminate the type of society that grows out of war and the modes of engagement it comes to value. Accordingly, I move away from this abstract and normatively-loaded language to analyze what volunteer engagement means in practical terms and to reveal the ethical considerations sustaining it and deriving from it. I examine the shifting understandings of citizenship duty, noting their gendered nature and national connotations. I rely on the feminist literature on war and civilian mobilization and the scholarship on national identity formation to focus on war-induced ruptures in the understanding of own roles and responsibilities towards community, nation and the state. In doing so, I point to the ways war engagement has re-traditionalised the understanding of gender roles among volunteers, elevating the status of men to

main decision makers and marginalizing women and discuss the implications it has for the citizen regime and nation-making in Ukraine. I also highlight the importance of national solidarities and national belonging in driving and sustaining volunteer engagement at the rear.

Another contribution of this dissertation lies in its methodological approach to studying civilian engagement in wartime. The studies cited by Skocpol et al. (2002), Kage (2010), and Putnam (2001) rely on surveys, reports and secondary sources to document spikes in the membership of organizations and map out tendencies of engagement, thus providing a macro-level analysis of collective action in wartime. While this method yields valuable insights on patterns of civilian engagement over time and across space, it has some limitations. The first shortcoming is the inability of surveys to provide qualitative information on the context of engagement or its meaning to those involved. Survey-based studies do not give a substantive account of who exactly participates or for what reasons. They tell us little about the effect of engagement on the individuals themselves. Increasingly, scholars use ethnographic methods to study wartime participation. Recently, studies have been conducted on the ideological convictions of combatants, their daily routines and practices as well as pathways for engagement (Ratelle 2013; Parkinson 2013; Souleimanov and Aliyev 2015). While studies yielded important insights about wartime mobilization, there are mostly limited to the military aspect of mobilization, not extending to the questions of civilian mobilization at the rear.

This study adopts an ethnographic approach to study civilian mobilization and identity formation from below. My analysis relies on 95 interviews with civilian volunteers, as well as participant observation of their work. The timing of the interview – in the spring-summer 2015 – allowed me to study volunteer practices and visit volunteer sites in the midst of war mobilization. These data allow me to determine its meaning for rearward civilians and observe the types of

interactions and their meaning to my respondents. In addition, it gave me an opportunity to ask questions about personal motivations for engagement, pathways to it and previous history of activism to construct an account of who got to join volunteer networks and why. An ethnographic analysis of the processes of mobilization and identity formation from below forces us to grapple with complicated, sometimes contradictory experiences of civilians we might otherwise miss. The value of this type of analysis rests on its richness and rigour achieved thanks to an opportunity to glance at the lives of civilian volunteers in the midst of their engagement and interrogate the significance of volunteer preoccupations to themselves. I discuss the usefulness of ethnography to studying civilian mobilization and identity formation in the Chapter 2 on Methodologies.

Studying the process of civilian mobilization at the rear and the reordering of identities also carries empirical significance. War is a critical juncture that puts societies on a different track. As scholars of collective action and war note, war-formed groups have long-lasting effects on postwar reconstruction (Kage 2010) and reconciliation efforts (Enloe 2000). More generally, communities emerging amidst war define the vibrancy and nature of postwar civic and political life (Putnam 2001). Given the importance of war-engendered groups, analysing the profile of civilian volunteers and the modes of engagement they came to value because of the war is key for understanding the social and political transformations underway in Ukraine. Learning how civilian volunteers relate to the state, community and nation hints at the challenges Ukraine will face in the future while suggesting the opportunities this mass scale engagement provides. Whereas the military dimension of mobilization in Ukraine has generated abundant academic interest, with scholars studying the ideological profile of volunteer fighters and their pathways to engagement (see Yudina 2015; Karagiannis 2016; Mitrokhin 2015; Malyarenko and Galbreath 2016; Legieć 2017 among others), scholarly attention to the mobilization of civilian networks has been more

modest (a notable exception is Shukan 2016; 2018). I contribute empirically by studying motivations, recruitment pathways and ethical considerations of 95 civilian volunteers whose lives were altered by war. Their stories resonate with the broader social and political transformations in Ukraine. By examining the trajectories and self-narratives of civilian volunteers, I reveal how identities at wartime are negotiated and why they take the forms they do.

The main difficulty with such a study is to show the socially situated nature of identity formation, whereby people redefine their understanding of self in relation to and in interaction with others. With that in mind, I draw attention to the war-engendered types of mobility, forms of sociality and modes of interaction to clarify how identities are being reshaped. Historical and political contexts are important to identity formation. Therefore, I place the experiences of civilian volunteers within the historical and political realities within which they operate. I point to war-induced ruptures in the understandings of self and discuss the generative effects of war on the ways individuals identify themselves. Ideally, the study of identity formation will integrate an analysis of state policies and state-led efforts to institutionalize particular types of identities. While I make note of some of these efforts, my analysis centers on the lives, experiences and narratives of civilian volunteers and provides an ethnographic account of wartime social change “from below.” This change, as the dissertation demonstrates, is inherently linked to the shifting citizen regimes in Ukraine and the conceptions of who counts as a legitimate member of the community. These conceptions, as I show, are gendered and conceived within a national framework of belonging.

The formation of citizen, gender, national and language identities

In this section, I outline the main theories employed in my empirical investigation of civilian mobilization and identity formation. I define my understanding of gender and language, national and citizen identities and situate each of these definitions within the literature. My

ontological perspective is that of a constructivist who understands gender, national and citizen facets of identity not as biological realities or essential qualities, but as products of discursive and material construction embedded in historical and social structures. In simple terms, people constitute an understanding of the self through a complex interplay of external conditions, social forces and available representations.

Citizen identity

I conceptualize citizen identity as a subset of identity categories understood as perspectives people have on their responsibilities towards others and duties to their country/state (Almond and Verba 2015). These perspectives situate the individual in society and signify his/her relations to the state. There are two interconnected elements that affect the formation of a citizen identity. The first pertains to the influence of group identifications, such as group membership, community belonging, nation, etc. on the ways individuals define ingroup and outgroup allegiances. These group identifications provide a foundation for sharing symbols and developing a sense of ethical responsibility. The second element includes self-identity, meaning the degree to which individuals adhere to particular values or beliefs and internalize them as part of the self: “I am the kind of person who believes such and such” (Haste 2004: 420). In that sense, the construction of citizen identity is inseparably linked to the broader processes of identity formation and should be understood as shaped by group allegiances and gender norms.

Haste (2004) defines four elements that are important for the construction of the citizen. The first refers to the ways individuals position themselves vis-à-vis others. In constructing a citizen identity, we define our relations towards others and affirm or deny our obligations. Lape (2010) notes through positioning, individuals demarcate the borders of entitlements and rights - those groups to which the rights are due. This is to say that through positioning, individuals justify

the distribution of resources, both material and symbolic, in society and engage in the politics of differentiation. The second element pertains to the importance of dialogue and language in the construction of the citizen. Haste notes that individuals are actors in this process, (re)making explanations and stories that enable them to make sense of experiences and develop an identity in a particular social and historical context. Haste (2004) stresses that this process is highly contextualized and negotiated through narrative and dialogue, as well as “through trying to make sense of social structures and representations” (2004: 420). Attention to the ways individuals express their beliefs and what issues they engage is important to understand their perspectives on good citizenship. The last element refers to the sense of agency and capacity to take responsibility. The sense of agency is related to the modes individuals choose to engage or the justifications they produce to stay disengaged. The perception that one is a “capable” citizen with necessary skills and competences to influence one’s surroundings is important for broader engagement.

A caveat here is that broader engagement or an acquired sense of responsibility or agency should not be taken as inherently good in and of itself. A growing body of literature points to the problematic aspects of broader engagement. Chambers and Kopstein (2001) contend that joining associations and partaking in public affairs can be illiberal and antidemocratic. What matters is not the abundance of community organizations per se, but the types of groups and the kinds of values they come to promote. The minimal condition necessary for positive tendencies to take root is for these groups to embrace the value of reciprocity as their guiding principle of public participation. Chambers and Kopstein say: “Reciprocity involves the recognition of other citizens, even those with whom one has deep disagreement as moral agents deserving civility” (2001:839). Those groups not conforming to this principle constitute what Chambers and Kopstein deem “bad civil society.” They promote particularist civility, not a democratic civility; they endorse trust,

public spiritedness and self-sacrifice, but only in relation to a particular group, and they often encourage behavior opposite to the behavior of those outside. Rigorous empirical research is required to study the ideological convictions of individuals and the types of civility they came to embrace. We need a more careful analysis of the ways citizen engagement is understood by social actors and what values and types of solidarities guide it.

Gender identity

I align myself with poststructuralist feminist scholarship when it comes to gender identity. After Judith Butler's seminal book *Gender Trouble* (2006a), gender identities came to be understood as "social temporalities" that can change over time and acquire new meanings and forms. Rather than treating bodies as factual materiality, something that exists as a fact of life, Butler suggests the body is always an embodiment of historic possibilities that "materialise through a series of revised, reviewed and consolidated acts" (Butler 2006b: 523). Being a man or a woman does not presuppose a specific substance or locus of agency from which various acts and behaviors proceed. Instead, constituting acts, such as bodily gestures, movements and enactments of various kinds, form and institute gendered identity as such. These acts, Butler contends, are never "fully self-styled as living styles have a history and that history conditions and limits the possibilities for types of enactment" (ibid: 521). These styles draw on a cultural intelligibility that governs social life. An important element in Butler's reflection on gender is her discussion of the process of gender identity reification. She notes that constant repetition of these constituting acts produces an illusion of stability and naturalness, giving an impression that gender identity proceeds and shapes one's behavior and acts, not the other way around: "One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well" (ibid: 521). These

insights give us tools to deconstruct how gender identities with the appearance of naturalness acquired that naturalness in the first place and how naturalness draws on “the desire of recognition of the gendered self as viable and intelligible subject” (Tyler and Cohen 2010:179).

Building on insights of gender identities as socially constructed, enacted and performed, numerous scholars expanded our understanding of the processes and mechanisms of gendering. Feminist scholars point to the importance of practices, embodied experiences and norms for the performance of specific modes of femininity and masculinity (Bulmer and Eichler 2017; Zalewski 2017; Stern and Zalewski 2009; Whitworth 2013). Others focus on the role of organizational settings in the performance of gender identities, showing how the gendered subject is brought into existence through the gendered inhabitation of spaces (Tyler and Cohen 2010). The abundance of scholarship on gender indicates that virtually anything can be gendered, from clothes to knowledge, and the process of gendering often occurs non-reflectively, with liminal awareness of it and in interaction with other individuals (Martin 2003).

These studies force us to think about making and unmaking of certain types of femininity and masculinity amidst war. As gender identities are fluid and never linear (Bulmer and Eichler 2017; Daphna-Tekoah and Harel-Shalev 2017), new social and political realities open space for gender negotiations to take place. The studies point to social sites, practical and emotional preoccupations, bodily practices, knowledge ontologies as sites where the work of gendering takes place and should be studied. I apply the insights of this scholarship to study the shifts in gender ideologies and identities in wartime.

National identity

I understand “nation” as a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves part of that group. Drawing on the constructivist scholarship on national

identity formation (Anderson 2006; Brubaker 1992; 1996; 2009; Suny 1993), I conceptualize nations as “imagined,” meaning that members do not personally know each other, but imagine their connectedness as a deep horizontal comradeship (Anderson 2006). This imagining is inherently limited, presupposing the construction of boundaries that delineate one nation from other nations. By virtue of their nature, such boundaries create “inner” and “outer” spaces, enabling a national imagining to take hold. Within “the inner” space, a construction of sameness occurs. The articulation of sameness is crucial in national imagining because it enables a group of people to see themselves as a coherent unit, engendering a “we” feeling and creating national unity. The construction of difference occurs in the “outer” space. Groups of people use various differentiation mechanisms to distinguish themselves as a nation, one that is different from the others. The process of “othering” can be rooted in the ethno-linguistic, territorial, historical and religious realities used to create outer boundaries. Again, this process allows a nation (or, more specifically, the people who express belonging in that nation) to see itself as a uniform entity with a distinctive historical path and a unique vision for the future. Boundary making is an important element in the construction of national identity, as it allows a group of people to legitimate a community and its separate existence. Certain historical, demographic and socio-political realities bring “nations” into existence and reify their meaning over time (Anderson 2006; Brubaker 1992; 1996; 2009; Suny 1993). My task in the empirical section is to show how the boundaries of belonging were reconstructed in Ukraine and how new imaginings of sameness and difference are being (re)articulated in the midst of war.

Scholars of nations and nationalism emphasize the role of national elites, cultural entrepreneurs and institutional arrangements in promoting particular types of identification with the nation. I take a different approach. I am interested in the vernacular (re)conceptualizations of

nation in everyday life and their shifts in wartime. I follow Bonikowski who suggests nationhood should be studied from “the bottom up as a set of intersubjective meanings and affective orientations that give people a sense of self and guide their social interactions and political choices” (2016:428). Bonikowski stresses that in such an analysis, the focus should be not on political ideologies per se, but on the collective narratives, symbolic representations and cultural schemas. These practices and discourses on national belonging are plural and dynamic, but can crystalize into self-conscious ideologies under certain circumstances. Goode and Stroup (2015) echo this point, advocating an “everyday nationalism” approach. They contend that the academic study of nationalism should focus less on elites and more on the quotidian practices by which national identities are enacted, embodied and performed. Among other things, attention should be directed towards the processes of “ethnicization” (Goode and Stroup 2015) by which material object and symbols acquire meaning in the national(ist) framework and act to delineate the nation and imbue it with meaning and legitimacy. I engage more closely with the vernacular notions of national identity and its new meaningfulness in wartime in the empirical section.

Language identities

Language identity is an important facet of national identity and a primary component of membership in a nation-state (Bilaniuk 2005; Blommaert 2005; Arel 2017). To understand why, we need to see “language” as socially constructed and ideologically related to the construction of a “nation.” Scholars of language politics contend that a standardized language is a political construct. Social life is characterized by a diversity of vernaculars, with different varieties, genres, styles and codes of linguistic behavior (Blommaert 2005; see also Arel 2017). This linguistic diversity is communicatively functional but does not in itself amount to “language” - a singular object that exists as a set of rules, standards and patterns (Blommaert 2005). “Distinctive”

languages, with their ostensible cohesiveness and structure, rest in large part on the linguistic standardization efforts advanced by social and political actors.

These standardization efforts stem from the “myth of homogeneity” whereby members of the nation are expected to adhere to the same linguistic standards for the sake of national homogeneity and coherence (Bilaniuk 2005). As the relationships between “language,” “nation” and “state” are not straightforward, attempts are made to bring the administrative boundaries of “states” in congruence with the symbolic boundaries of “nations” (Blommaert 2005). State actors often engage in “nationalizing” projects to address this disjuncture, and these projects are ideologically driven. Through state policies, language use can be regulated in a wide variety of domains, including education, immigration, and high or popular culture. These regulations are aimed at homogenizing the nation and emphasizing its distinctiveness from other nations. Arel (2017) notes that ethnonationalist ideologies intimately link the claim to linguistic distinctiveness to the right for recognition and a separate existence of the “nation” as a state.

The scholars of nationalism and language emphasize that there is nothing “natural” or “primordial” about specific beliefs about language practices, even though appeals to social and historical justice can confer legitimacy on them (Bilaniuk 2005). The same goes for the idea of “native language speaker,” “mother tongue” or “ethnolinguistic group”, as these signifiers have considerable ideological force and should be understood as social constructs (Blommaert and Rampton 2012). Speakers and hearers, however, often notice linguistic signifiers and map their understandings of them onto people (Irvine and Gal 2009). In so doing, they are guided by language ideologies – sets of beliefs and attitudes connecting linguistic differences to differentiated social status (Bilaniuk 2005). Language ideologies are enacted when speakers or hearers state an opinion about a particular language use. These statements evoke images of

systemic behavior with aesthetic, affective, moral and political connotations, thus mapping out a person's social position in relation to others (Irvine and Gal 2009). Far from being politically insignificant or neutral, language ideologies can empower some groups as “good” and “patriotic” citizens and disempower others if their language practices are seen as disloyal to the state or the nation. Language ideologies and sociolinguist practices of individuals are fluid and contingent on the social and political environment. Shifts in national identification in linguistically diverse societies tend to reshape language ideologies, legitimizing some discourses and practices over others.

War, limited statehood, collective action and citizen identity

I now move on to the literature that helps us understand how gender, national, language and citizen identities are mobilized in wartime and how war engagement can reconfigure these identities. In the first section, I explore the literature on collective action in wartime and the formation of subjects as “citizens.” I situate this discussion within the literature on limited statehood, because it sheds analytical light on the spaces carved out by war for grassroots engagement and helps us to contextualize the processes of identity formation. In the second section, I present the insights of feminist scholars on how certain constructions of gender enable the production of warfare and how wartime mobilization can affect gender roles and gender regimes. In the third section, I review the scholarship on national identities in wartime, discussing why national identities become stronger during war. Throughout this final section, I point to the ways citizen, gender, national and language identities interlock and reinforce each other, making it necessary to analyze them together.

The scholarship on self-organization amidst war and crisis points out that ordinary residents often mobilize to address the immense humanitarian, material, and infrastructural costs

of war in cases where the state cannot cope with them. As war causes massive destruction, injury and dispossession, it strains the ability of states to govern, provide public services and regulate state-citizen relations. Jansen (2014) talks about the “ungridding” of the state amidst war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He uses the term “gridding” to emphasize the ways states organize our daily lives and provide a sense of normalcy and directionality to it. During the Sarajevo siege, however, state practices and institutions dissolved, leaving residents of the city on their own to replicate daily routines and ensure the contingency of essential practices (for example, education). Similarly, Leander (2004) notes that wars unmake fragile state structures and lead to institutional dismantling. In short, scholars have documented a multitude of ways through which state functioning is inhibited or obliterated in wartime.

The accounts of state challenges in addressing the demands of war suggest the need to differentiate between normative obligations of the state to govern, implement decisions and provide welfare on the one hand and war-induced realities on the other. The scholarship on “limited statehood” provides conceptual tools for this type of analysis, making important distinctions between “ideal statehood” (what the state is supposed to do) and “limited statehood” (what the state is actually capable of achieving) in terms of service provision and citizens’ rights protection. This strand of scholarship also helps us contextualize the environment within which civilian volunteers operated at the outset of war and gives us a pathway into studying non-state interventions that emerge autonomously from, parallel to or in lieu of the state.

The scholarship on limited statehood developed in response to the traditional understanding of the state as an entity responsible for the provision of security/protection and the supply of public/collective goods. The traditional accounts posit that the state can deliver on these functions if it possesses a differentiated set of institutions and a monopoly on authoritative and

binding rule-making (Mann 1994; Lockhart and Ghani 2008). Those states unable to secure a monopoly on rule-making or incapable of supplying and administering basic services and goods, such as welfare, education or healthcare, are labeled “fragile,” “failing” or “failed.” Recently, scholars have problematized the artificial dichotomy between “failing” states and those “functioning properly,” showing that it does not adequately reflect the reality on the ground (Risse 2012; 2013; Risse and Lehmkuhl 2012). They argue that normative assumptions about the state rely on the experiences of developed countries, obscuring those of the rest of the world. In reality, most states face material, institutional, political and other types of constraints that restrict their ability to make and implement decisions, deliver services, and exert control. Scholars argue that labelling these states as “failed” is not productive, as it masks the variety of ways states struggle to fulfill their functions and renders invisible the diversity of alternative modes of governance that emerge in these spaces.

To address this conceptual deficiency, some scholars suggest differentiating between state and statehood (Börzel et al. 2012; Risse 2012). They define the state as a *hierarchical structure* with fixed boundaries and political authority to make decisions. The state institutionalizes the relationships between state and non-state actors within the territory over which it assumes authority. They understand statehood as a *property* which defines the ability of the state to make and enforce decisions – i.e., to govern. Limited ability to govern does not occur exclusively because of war but, in fact, represents the global default, with states struggling to fulfill their core functions to a varying degree (Risse and Stollenwerk 2018).

The usefulness of this type of distinction for the present analysis lies in its ability to dissect the areas of limited statehood that emerge because of war and open up for non-state engagement. Risse (2012) points out four such areas where the state’s capacities are constrained

and its authority limited. The first is in the territorial aspects of statehood; in such cases, states do not have full control over the entire country's territorial space or experience strain in specific geographic locations. Non-government controlled areas under the condition of war is one example. The second area of difficulty pertains to sectoral restrictions when states find they have limited capacity in a specific policy area, such as national security or social welfare provision. The third area is social; states face difficulties providing for particular categories of the population, such as the internally displaced in war or conscripted soldiers. The fourth is temporal; states find themselves under temporal strain to control violence or enforce decisions. Scholars of limited statehood emphasize that while states facing these restrictions are not about to fail, they have areas where they either cannot implement central policies or exercise security control or both.

Ferguson and Gupta (2002) make an important contribution to the conceptualization of statehood, pointing out that states are not simply functional bureaucratic entities. They are also "imagined." The imagery of the state rests on two principles that are key to the state's functioning: the principle of verticality through which the state is imagined as being "above" society and the principle of encompassment, through which the state is understood as encompassing and reaching through society. Ferguson and Gupta say: "These two metaphors work together to produce a taken-for-granted spatial and scalar image of a state that both sits above and contains its localities, regions and communities" (2002:982). Encounters with state institutions and bureaucrats shape the ways people experience the statehood and imagine state capacities. Based on these perceptions, they develop an understanding of their realities and calibrate their actions in response (Asmolov 2014). These insights are valuable for my study because they point to the need to examine the perceptions on the ground about the state's capacity to cope with the unfolding war in Ukraine and how these understandings undergirded civilian actions.

The scholarship on limited statehood also posits that in areas where states are unable to fully govern, the state does not descend into chaos. Instead, non-state actors intervene to provide public goods and security in lieu of the state (Risse 2013) acting as its “functional equivalents” (Börzel et al. 2012). Ample empirical evidence documents alternative and creative modes of governance that emerge in the areas of limited statehood under war. A study by Jansen (2014), for example, demonstrates how ordinary citizens in besieged Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina self-organized to provide schooling for children and ensure the continuity of education. Self-organization served to re-establish a sense of “normalcy” under war by replicating state practices “from below.” Similar studies (Zimmermann 2013; Risse 2012; Menkhaus 2007; Vaiou and Kalandides 2017; Risse and Lehmkuhl 2012; Koehler 2012) document various collective modes of regulating social matters, implementing binding rules and providing goods in areas where states struggle to govern. These interventions, as Chojnacki and Branovic (2011) note, have a strong territorial component, and are tied to the logic of the warfare and the dynamics of violence. The study of civilian action at the rear, therefore, should be situated within a geographic and social context of warfare for a more rigorous analysis of its dynamics.

Looking at the emergence and functioning of volunteer networks in Ukraine through the lens of limited statehood is a useful critical option. It suggests ways of thinking about spaces of limited statehood that emerged in the regions bordering the warzone and delineates areas open for grassroots interventions. It gives us conceptual tools to capture the disjuncture between obligations of the state in terms of social welfare and security provision and realities on the ground. It highlights territorial, sectoral and institutional restraints that state bureaucracies can face because of war and mass displacement. It also brings to our attention the ways the state’s capacity is experienced and imagined by its citizens in their encounters with national and local bureaucracies.

Thus, the lens of limited statehood opens up the possibility of analyzing different dimensions of limited statehood as experienced by citizens and the grassroots interventions that emerge to address them.

The effects of war on citizen identities

However, we need to establish how an increased need for assistance amidst limited statehood translates into collective action at the rear. In other words, what drives people to invest their time, considerable personal resources and often put their lives at risk to help others? Studies of engagement under extremities show that there is no “heroic” or “altruistic” personality that can explain the urge of individuals to help others (Krebs 1992; Penner 2004; Verba et al. 1995; Measham and Barnett 2008; Oliner et al. 1992; Smolenska and Reykowski 1992). Scholars generally agree that there are multiple reasons why people donate time and resources and act altruistically. The consensus seems to be that the decision to help is a complex one and must be analyzed in the broader context of circumstances, social pressure and socialization. Some go further, noting that “the concrete detail of the moment” (Darley 1995) should be taken into consideration, in other words, the exact nature of the circumstances when the decision to respond to the needs of others is made. Our task is to establish empirically the exact nature of circumstances that initiated volunteer engagement.

While the exact reasons for initial engagement should be established empirically, academics increasingly emphasize the role of “affect” in mobilising and sustaining collective action in sites of heightened precarity. This is a useful critical lens for our study of civilian participation in wartime, as war and “affect” are intimately linked. Fortier (2016) uses the term “affect” to designate “a generic category of emotions and feelings, including embodied and sensory feelings through which we experience the world, and through which worlds, subjects and

objects are enacted and brought forth” (Fortier 2016: 1039). It is not reducible to rational or conscious decisions and represents a “structure of feelings” that frames the way we make sense of and act in the world (Bagelman 2016). Wars fracture our sense of coherence and challenge basic assumptions about life. At the same time, the injurious nature of war generates a space for new modes of meaning making, attachment and a structure of feelings to unfold. New forms of attachment are shaped by the historical, institutional and social realities in which individuals operate. Fortier states: “There is a political cultural economy of affect; a logic to how, through formal and informal institutional arrangements, some feelings are validated while others are not. And this (in)validation attaches itself to bodies” (2016: 1039).

In this regard, Johnson (2010) identifies two mechanisms through which “affect” is mobilized. The first one includes a top down process where politicians, in their speeches, encourage people to feel a certain way about people and issues at stake. They attempt to elicit “the right feelings” that “good citizens” should feel towards themselves and others in a public context (Johnson 2010: 495). Individuals, for example, can be expected to demonstrate “affection and loyalty” to their nation or show suspicion to those who are seen as “enemy” or “outsiders.” Berlant (2005) and Fortier (2008) note that mobilizing through emotion – fear, suspicion, loyalty – has become prevalent during the last century and particularly effective in times of social, political and economic upheavals. In wartime, as Quiney (1998) demonstrates, “angels of mercy” – Canadian female nurses in military hospitals - were encouraged to express gratitude to the military and practice maternal and nurturant care for the soldiers. Appeal to the emotional – gratitude, mercy, motherhood care - was a strong propaganda tool that idealized the role of white-veiled nurses, legitimized women’s participation in the war effort and sustained the military. Citizens who do not

express “the right feelings” become the point of critique. Their identities become scrutinized and questioned (Johnson 2010).

The second mechanism pertains to citizens self-governing their emotions and recognizing particular forms of attachment towards others as valid (Johnson 2010). Shukan (2018) presents an example of engagement through affect. Through an ethnographic study, she shows that “care-giving” female volunteers in Ukrainian military hospitals manage their emotions in a way to create the most comfortable environment for the injured to get through the treatment. Female volunteers self-regulate their emotions not to express pity or show tears, investing emotional labour into making soldiers feel dignified amidst injury and trauma. Their sustained engagement, Shukan contends, can be understood through the prism of affective relations fostered between volunteers and the soldiers. The soldiers that volunteers got to help were seen as deserving of such assistance because of their military service for Ukraine. Thus, the production of attachment and affect “from below” depends on the acknowledgement of certain groups as “deserving” and validation of attachment towards them. Combined, the top down and bottom up processes constitute “emotional regimes” that regulate engagement, signify groups in need of assistance and legitimize certain forms of emotion towards them.

The recognition of some groups as “deserving” requires additional attention as it has implications for citizenship entitlements and rights. Fortier (2010) notes that the production of attachment arises from physical, financial, material investments that are required to sustain or reorient it. The production of attachment is labour intensive with efforts directed towards translating private emotions into the public and acting upon them. Yuval-Davis (2006) adds that this type of work is done by specific social agents who construct and point to certain analytical and political features, making it possible for other members of society to identify groups in

precarity and respond to their needs. Isin and Nielsen elaborate on this observation stating that individual actors engage in the signification work that designates some groups of individuals as “those to whom the right to have rights is due” (Isin and Nielsen 2008 quoted in Fortier 2016: 1040). This means that the subjects engaging in affective engagement see their engagement as claiming or reclaiming the rights of those who are legitimately entitled to them, regardless of their formal status. Johnson (2010) emphasizes that this has significant implications for citizens’ entitlements, distribution of material and symbolic resources. The understanding of entitlements is entwined with the local political circumstances and framed by state’s ability to provide for “deserving” citizens (Johnson 2010; Staeheli et al. 2012). When the state is seen as lacking the capacity to do so, ordinary citizens can intervene to enact the rights of individuals who are seen as entitled to them.

Traumatic events, such as wars, rapidly transform the general understanding of rights and entitlements, redrawing the boundaries of attachment around war-impacted populations or the military (Enloe 2000; Cohn and Enloe 2003). This can include those groups that found themselves in heightened precarity because of war and the state’s lacking capacity to care for needy citizens. These new forms of attachment can translate into radically new forms of belonging (Vrasti and Dayal 2016) demarcated by war-induced precarity and vulnerability, but not determined by it. Staeheli et al. make a similar argument, stating that affective interventions and seemingly mundane acts that redraw the boundaries of belonging “give rise and lead to varied forms of contact and engagement that holds the potential to nudge established patterns of control and authority and anticipate new political acts” (2012: 630).

In the empirical part of the dissertation, I show how “affect” experienced as empathy, gratitude or fear is attached to the bodies of soldiers and internally displaced persons to categorize

them as groups in need of assistance and active support. I demonstrate that through affective engagement, civilian volunteers make war-affected individuals feel as valued members of society and enable them to exercise their legal rights in practice. The result of these efforts is a *substantive citizenship* (Glenn 2009) of combatants and internally displaced persons, where they are treated as full and legitimate members of communities and the state. I conceptualize the rights-based interventions of civilian volunteers as acts of affective citizenship that lead to the redrawing of boundaries of belonging, entitlements and worthiness.

Two important additions should be made regarding affective engagement. The first one pertains to the potential of affective engagement to shape identities (Di Gregori and Merolli 2016). Bagelman (2016) notes that through the labour invested into the production of attachment, individual actors reorient themselves towards particular understandings of political realities, modes of acting and relating to others and constitute themselves as citizens. Their interpretation of what it means to be a good citizen and what roles and responsibilities they have towards others is shaped by new experiences and adversities. In that sense it is important to emphasize the developmental, dynamic and exclusionary nature of citizen identity formation. The first quality refers to citizen identity formation as a process whereby individuals incorporate their new experiences, discovered resilience and capacities into their conception of the self as citizen (Youniss and Yates 1997). This process is dynamic as it occurs in and shaped by the socio-political realities within which engagement takes place. Specific sites of war-engendered communication and exchange provide the social and geographic backdrop against which the reconceptualization of citizen identity unfolds. This process is exclusionary because the nature of affect is such that it attaches itself to specific bodies or groups of people, validating emotions towards them and obscuring them towards others. The formation of citizenship identities is never complete and

always in flux. Yet it is possible to speak of dominant ideas of what it means to be a good citizen during certain historical periods.

The second insight pertains to the ways “affect” and emotional regimes interconnect with the construction of gender and national identities. Fortier writes: “The prescription of sentiment – of feelings for the nation, for the community, for the neighbor [...] is also what race and ethnicity are about. [...] the very act of naming who and how to love, suspect, befriend, care for, embrace, welcome, and so on, performatively constructs racial, ethnic, cultural and national differences along with their gender, sexual, class and generational “identities” (2008: 89). It is important to investigate the interlocking between citizen, gender, national and language identities in relation to affective engagement and war. To do so, I draw on the feminist and nation formation scholarship examining how national and gender identities are implicated in the production of warfare and can change as a result of it.

Gender identities and war

What is the relationship between war and gender identities? How are gender identities entangled in the production of warfare? In his seminal book *War and Gender*, Goldstein (2003) reveals that the very possibility of waging a war hinges on the capacity of states and societies to construct gendered representations of what it means to be a man and a woman in a way that enables the war system to function. He notes that the operation of armies and fighting forces requires the molding of men and boys into combatants and warriors, able to commit violence and kill. As killing does not come naturally to men, the process of connecting manhood to warfare requires societies and states to invest a great deal of effort in the making of “militarized” masculinity, an understanding of manhood in relation to the military service. For example, biological discourses on men’s suitability for combat promulgate the idea that the men’s genetic makeup prompts them

to be aggressive and prone to violence. Their larger size and strength, as well as their (claimed) orientation towards competitiveness, are posited as biological evidence of their natural fitness for combat (Eichler 2011; Goldstein 2003). Even though these pseudo-scientific statements lack credibility, they are powerful discourses constructing men's identity as combatants or warriors.

This biological framing is coupled with various practices and rituals, which further normalize the link between manhood and wars. For example, military training, honour ceremonies, and state and social propaganda socialize men into warfare, propagating the "fighting spirit" and romanticizing the battlefield and combat (Eichler 2011; Goldstein 2003). Sport programs can serve as a type of paramilitary training to promote cooperation, solidarity and synchronize the movements of participants necessary for warfare (Hoffmann 2011). Drawing on historically and culturally available images of men as warriors and fighters, the socialization of men into warriors promotes certain types of "masculinity," indispensable to warfare. These forms of masculinity are often invoked in nationalist projects, national conflicts and wars, where men are called to "take up arms and defend the nation" from real or imagined threats (Yuval-Davis 1993). The iconography of "nation" is often depicted in feminine terms, as the "mother" land, and the image of nation as woman, whether as mother, virgin, goddess or victim is widespread across countries (Yuval-Davis 1993). These representations and discourses construct a gendered understanding of citizen duty that obliges men to engage militarily.

While men are often positioned in relation to warfare and the military, women are seen as "the guardians of the nation." In this way, women are called upon to guard the boundaries of a nation and ensure its survival. This positions women as the "bearers of the collective," a cultural role aimed at reproducing "the nation" culturally and biologically. High death tolls associated with warfare promote discourses about a demographic crisis and existential national threats, amplifying

the need for more people (mostly men) to be born. This can lead to the intensification of discourses that call upon women to ensure the survival of the “nation” (Yuval-Davis 1993). Women’s positioning as embodiments of the collective and as bearers of cultural and biological reproduction dictates their roles during war away from combat and orients them towards care and support of the “protectors.” Discourses of “guardian femininity” and “militarized masculinity” reify the sexual division of labour during war, allocating power to men and women differently. Yuval-Davis (1993) notes that this is especially the case when there is a clear distinction between “home” and “front” at war.

Cohn and Enloe (2003) stress that “militarized” images of masculinity and corresponding models of femininity are always defined in relation to each other. Wartime discourses construct women in opposition to men as “peaceful,” “nurturing” and “preserving life.” This positioning of women allows for the justification of wars as been fought for the sake of “women and children” (Cohn and Enloe 2003), where women are relegated to the role of “the protected.” In this manner, the dichotomy of “the protected/protector” (Yuval-Davis 1993) is established. While men are called to fight, women are expected to stay away from the battlefield, take care of the household, and wait for men to return home. These constructions of “militarized” masculinity and “guardian femininity” are never “automatic,” and “rarely self-perpetuating.” Rather, they are produced through daily tending and decisions that are often masked as “tradition” (Cohn and Enloe 2003: 43). These constructions rely on women’s recognition of protection as desirable and of the connection between manhood and military service as legitimate and/or natural. In that sense, it is important not to conflate men with masculinities (Halberstam 1998), as masculinities are not something men naturally possess but something that is discursively and socially regulated.

Critical military scholars note that even though women are usually regarded as not suited for warfare, women's lives can be "militarized." For a long time, militarization has been understood in narrow terms as an ideology that promotes the dominance of the military in society and assigns it the political legitimacy required for policy making. Most research on militarization has focused on economic transformations, charting the ways militaries have secured large budgets and reoriented production towards the needs of armies. The insights of Cynthia Enloe have revolutionized the ways we think about militarization and its workings. She contends that "Militarization is a step-by-step process by which a person or a thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military or comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas. The more militarization transforms an individual or a society, the more that individual or society comes to imagine military needs and militaristic presumptions to be not only valuable but also normal" (Enloe 2000: 3). To this she adds, "Many people become militarised in their ways of thinking, in how they live their daily lives, in what they aspire to for their children or their society, without ever wielding a rifle or donning a helmet (Enloe 2000: 2).

Militarization, thus, is redefined to signify a micro-level process that permeates daily routines and discourses, transforming them so that people embrace war-like values, militaristic practices, hypermasculinity and the corresponding modes of identification. Civilians play a crucial role in the militarization of society at large, as they affirm, normalize and popularize militaristic values and produce discourses that elevate the status of the military. In this way, civilians endow the military with political legitimacy and decision-making powers (Enloe 1983; Cohn and Enloe 2003; Enloe 2016). The analysis of gender identities in wartime should integrate the insights of this strand of literature to understand the impact of mass conscription and war on civilians and

combatants alike and the extent to which certain forms of masculinity and femininity become militarized.

Recently, scholars of critical military studies started questioning the validity of “militarised masculinity” as a concept, dissecting its ontological coherence and calling for renewed reflection about its value and usage in feminist scholarship (Bulmer and Eichler 2017; Zalewski 2017; Stern and Zalewski 2009; Whitworth 2013). Particularly, they draw attention to the danger of the reification of the “military masculinity” narrative that subsumes and obscures complex realities and experiences of war veterans and conscripted men, leading to misrepresentation, simplification and misguided generalisation of their personal, social, political stories (Zalewski 2017). Some have criticized exceptionalizing “military masculinity” and creating artificial binaries between civilians and militaries (Daphna-Tekoah and Harel-Shalev 2017), with Bulmer and Eichler (2017) noting that the two are inherently and intimately interconnected: one is never only a military – one also carries remnants of civilian life. They also point out that militarised masculinities should not be treated as identities, but as practices, embodied experiences and norms and we should always be attuned to the possibilities of *unmaking* of them.

The effect of wars on gender identities

Although women are often represented as marginal to the production of warfare, they play an indispensable role for sustaining the military. The pioneering research of Enloe (1983) discusses the reliance of the military on women who have been used in multiple ways to ease the hardships of men in the army, keep the rates of military enlistment high and maintain the morale and health of military personnel. Throughout centuries, women have served as wives, prostitutes, nurses, and clerks. While women have been exploited for the purposes of the military in numerous and profound ways, Enloe notes that ideologically their role has been obscured in the functioning

of armies. Women assisting the army have often been framed as outcasts of society, as those intruding on “a man’s world” and destined to be controlled and punished by military authorities (Enloe 1983). Among others, the importance of female labour to the functioning of the military has been made invisible to perpetuate the image of combat and warfare as “male only” zones.

History provides us with abundant examples of how female labour sustains warfare and gets obscured in it. Examining the nature and extent of Australian women’s unpaid work during World War I, Scates (2001) shows that Australian military forces relied on “a vast army” of female volunteers, with an enormous amount of unpaid labour invested in sustaining the army. Along with sewing and knitting garments for soldiers and fundraising for their various needs, women also engaged in mediating war-induced grief and bereavement. This “emotional labour,” as Scates calls it, was essential in helping soldiers and their families cope with the trauma of loss.¹² Female circles and clubs served as “adoptive kin” or a “surrogate family” for those in mourning, comforting them and reducing emotional and psychological distress. At the end of World War I, these women were erased from the remembrance ceremonies and their contribution to the war effort was mostly unrecognized (Scates 2001). Similarly, the study by Harman (2015) sheds light on the provision of comforts to impoverished Aboriginal soldiers in Australia in the Second World War by white women, exposing the gendered and class-based nature of such an assistance.

A growing number of scholars examine the significance of female labour and the particularity of women’s experience in the context of Eastern Europe. The recently published book *Zhinky Tsentral’noi ta Skhidoï Evropy u Druhy svitovii viïni* (Central and East European Women and the Second World War) (Hrinchenko et al. 2015) examines the fate of female members of the

¹² The term “emotional labour” was first introduced by the sociologist Arlie Hochschild to refer to publicly visible forms of emotion regulation in the workplace and the commodification of emotions in the feminized sector of service work (Hochschild 1979; 1983).

Red Army, noting their participation in the underground resistance movement (Rebrova 2015; Ginhda 2015) and their experiences living in occupied territories (Stiazhkina 2015). Burds (2001) reveals gender-based recruitment tactics adopted by nationalist rebel groups in West Ukraine at the end of World War II and the opportunities it allowed for the Soviets to target and solicit ethnic Ukrainian women as “secret agents” to undermine the underground movement. These studies indicate that great upheavals, such as mass scale mobilizations during war, profoundly reshuffle societies and engage men and women in new and unfamiliar tasks. These practices and new forms of cooperation and communication can create spaces for renegotiating gender identities.

How exactly does this reordering of gender identities occur? Kuumba (2001) argues that initial mass mobilization draws on the forms of femininity and masculinity already institutionalized in a given society. The institutionalized dimension of gender refers to the way gender organizes social life and divides labour into separate spheres of responsibility. These spheres are related to different male-female roles and imply a differentially valued positioning in society. Individuals internalize and transmit these roles and behaviors through gender socialization, cementing what Connell (1996) terms “gender regimes” – a set of socially validated norms and expectations for men and women and the sexual division of labour and authority patterns. They are not only the means of social ordering, but they demarcate and distribute power in society (Scott 1999). Gender regimes are fluid and contingent on the economic, historic and demographic realities within which they operate (Cohn and Enloe 2003; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Ethnographic and historical studies have revealed a diversity of patterns and mechanisms through which gender regimes interact with the social setting, enacting various configurations of masculinity and femininity, and reconstructing the existing ones.

Studies have also found multiple patterns of masculinity and femininity within the gender regime of any given society, with culturally dominant forms of masculinity termed *hegemonic masculinity*. Connell (1996: 209) writes: “‘Hegemonic’ signifies a position of cultural authority and leadership, not total dominance; other forms of masculinity persist alongside.” This masculinity is hegemonic in relation to other forms of masculinities and also in relation to women, expressing men’s *collective privilege* over them. The culturally central form of femininity is called *emphasized femininity* (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) and refers to models of femininity supportive of the patriarchy and complicit in its legitimation. It is important to note that hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity usually refer to *idealized forms*, with individuals enacting them to various degrees in everyday life. These concepts clarify the hierarchical and normative aspects of dominant masculinities and explain how they are reproduced through cultural, institutional and discursive ascendancy (Bickerton 2015). In their later work, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) emphasized that hegemonic masculinities are plural and their construction should be studied in terms of discursive and material practices and bodily experiences.

As war reshuffles social relations and unleashes new modes of mobility, communication and exchange, it presents new settings within which the renegotiation of gender identities and gender regimes takes place. To understand how this process unfolds, Paechter’s (2003a; 2003b) notion of treating masculinities and femininities as localized communities of practice is useful. She suggests boys/young men and girls/young women initially come to establish their gender identities through their peripheral participation in the gendered communities of masculinity and femininity. As gender identity has to be enacted through repetitive performances and practices, the learning of specific performative and discursive forms comes through membership in these localized communities. This conceptualization treats gender identities as learning trajectories and

allows us to study specific locales, in this case, volunteer sites in Ukraine, as spaces within which the “situated learning” of gender identities takes place. Through this learning, male and female participants in the war effort come to reconfigure their understanding of “the gendered self” in relation to events and encounters with other members of the community.

In other words, war-engendered “situated learning” can become a catalyst for transforming or reinforcing existing gender regimes. These transformations can be complex and contradictory. In this respect, Scates (2001) observes that Australian women’s engagement in volunteer work during World War I both challenged and reinforced traditional gender roles. When men were conscripted, women gained new opportunities previously unavailable to them, such as running newspapers, attending nightly meetings in towns and cities, being elected to office and discussing politics. Women expanded their spheres of influence and responsibility over areas monopolized by men in the past. At the same time, their voluntary work as “sock knitters” and mediators of grief and bereavement reified the conventional gender roles and reinforced women’s domestic work as their main occupation. The Australian experience differs from that of Great Britain; here, women’s war work profoundly intruded on men’s traditional roles, partially equalizing their social and economic standing, and subsequently leading to women’s emancipation (Scott 1999). In Great Britain, war presented a critical juncture for renegotiating gender identities in a more progressive way.

These examples suggest there is no pre-defined pattern for the transformation of gender relations during war with a particular outcome for women. In some circumstances, wars can open up spaces for women in the public sphere, elevating their status. In others, wars foreclose opportunities and keep women in the domestic sphere. Regardless of the outcome, war mobilization creates space for social and discursive renegotiations of gender regimes and gender

identities. Culturally dominant ideals of masculinity and femininity can be reinterpreted against the backdrop of war realities. The dissertation's task is to analyze why traditional gender roles have been reproduced instead of challenged in Ukraine and to consider what forms of masculinity and femininity have become socially central in volunteer communities.

National identities and war

What is the relationship between war and national identities? What is the role of warfare in constructing nations? Scholars of nations and nationalism observe that wars or other abrupt, explosive events can amplify national sentiments and strengthen national attachment. For example, Rose (2003) says national belonging in Britain became sharpened during World War II. She shows that the British came to understand their nation as a people – a singular people – albeit part of a national community united by the calamities of war. A unitary national identity was forged through the total mobilization of the citizenry and the immense sacrifices of the civilian population. Discursively and ideologically, social commentators and public officials depicted wartime Britain as a unified land of “ordinary people” who stoically bore all deprivations and sacrifices out of patriotism and deep emotional unity. Everyone “was doing their bit” (Rose 2003: 5). The generated myth, whereby the British of all classes remained resilient in the face of the war and ordinary men and women contributed to the war effort, allowed the British to perceive themselves as “a deep, horizontal comradeship,” concludes Rose (2003: 7). She argues that even though the depictions of the nation as a unitary “we” were riddled with contradictions and remained open to contestation, attempts to fashion a singular identity reinforced the significance of the nation as an object of personal identification and strengthened emotional attachment to nationhood.

Along similar lines, Weiner (1996) argues that World War II was a watershed in the articulation of political and ethnonational identities within the Soviet Union and its republics. The

Great Patriotic War, as it is known in Russia and some of the former Soviet territories, provided the Soviet polity with a unifying theme, where all republics were proclaimed united against the common enemy. At the same time, the universalising discourse provided space to articulate particular identities along ethno-national lines. Weiner uses the cases of Vinnytsia, in Central-West Ukraine, to demonstrate how local actors, mainly peasant-soldiers, became the articulators of ethnonational formulations about the war. Commemorative acts and personal reflections established a link between the sacrifice and heroism of the Ukrainian war generation and the ultimate victory, thereby Ukrainianising the Soviet myth of the war. As these and other examples illustrate, wars can solidify and reinforce national identities.

What is it about war that makes “the nation” inspire passionate loyalty and strengthen national identification? In answering this question, I draw on the scholarship that discusses the potency of national imaginings for subjective meaning making. Scholars of nations and nationalism (Suny 1993; Anderson 2006; Hutchinson 2017) contend that wars are constructive for the production of national identities because of their potential to instill new meaning. They stress that even though nations are “invented” entities, created by socio-political forces and policies, they can confer such a strong emotional attachment and legitimacy upon their members that people are often willing to sacrifice their lives for a nation. We can explain this profound attachment, Anderson argues, if we analyze nationalism in the context of cultural systems, like religion, for example, instead of grouping it with other ideologies. All humans confront arbitrariness in the shape of injuries, disabilities, displacement, death, and so forth: “We are all aware of the contingency and ineluctability of our particular genetic heritage, our gender, our life-era, our physical capabilities, our mother-tongue” (2006:10). The merit of traditional religious world views was their ability to address the issues of human suffering and death, “transforming fatality into

continuity (karma, original sin, etc.)” (ibid), thereby injecting meaning into devastating experiences of loss, suffering and death. In recent centuries, however, the appeal of religion declined in the Western world, necessitating a secular transformation of fatality into continuity and contingency into meaning. Anderson says few things were better suited for this task than the idea of nation.

Anderson proposes that national imaginings are best understood as having an affinity with religious imaginings, in that nationalism helps people reconcile with disintegration, suffering, and death, addressing a lack of meaning in the arbitrariness and randomness of human existence. The emotional legitimacy of nations and nationalism, then, lies in continuity with the past, on the one hand, and hopes for the future, on the other. Hutchinson (2017) echoes this observation, adding that nations should be understood as “quasi-religious” communities. He contends that the potency of nationalists “rests on their capacity to appropriate religious symbols for the nation” for meaning making purposes (52). This includes commemoration ceremonies and social rituals that bind the living in moral obligation to the dead to sustain the nation against its adversities. Public commemoration of the dead represents “a surrogate religion” (Durkheim quoted in Hutchinson 2017: 62) and fulfills an important meaning making role to explain a time marked by mass death. As Hutchinson notes, wars act as mythomoteur (a constituting myth) as they present raw material for myth making that give people a sense of purpose. “Myths of war” become associated with the origins and mission of the nation, thus ensuring the contingency of meaning. These myths lodge in the consciousness of people and become a framework for interpreting and evaluating events.

The production of meaning around traumatic experiences is a complex and multivalent symbolic process embedded in the political surroundings. Alexander (2004) identifies four issues essential to the creation of a new master narrative. The first has to do with the nature of the pain –

what actually happened to the particular group or collectivity? The second has to do with the nature of the victim – who was affected by this traumatizing event? Was it a particular group or “the people” in general? The third relates victims to the wider audience – to what extent does the wider audience share the identity of the victim and to what extent can it participate in the experience of the originating trauma? The fourth concerns the attribution of responsibility – who caused the trauma? It is around these four questions, Alexander contends, that the master narrative is constructed. Hutchinson (2017) adds that master narratives should be understood as open to regular reconstruction and contestation. Populations generally produce several master narratives that overlay each other or provide resources for intra-group competition (2017:57). Contestations to control the meaning of master narratives are common and can easily be politicized. While elites might attempt to control the production of master narratives and war myths, Hutchinson says there is a degree of spontaneity involved in this process, with social groups from below engaging with these narratives on their own terms (ibid). There contestations signify not only a struggle for power, but also the presence of alternative conceptions of the nation.

Despite their contentious potential, new master narratives generate new modes of imagining where communities expand the circle of the “we” to include those symbolically impacted by a traumatic experience, significantly revising the collective identity. If wars are fought within a national framework, then identity revisions occur along national lines, strengthening identification with “the nation” and drawing links with past and future generations. The new experiences of war and suffering are integrated into the national framework, providing new points of connectedness and solidarity. In this way, continuity is re-established and war-disrupted life becomes meaningful again. Hutchinson (2017) adds that the “we” boundary making is reinforced by the competing propaganda that imposes categorizations onto a group of people and leads to the

polarization and reification of identities. Once the national framework emerges, it precludes certain kinds of historical inquiries and functions as an explanation and justification of the happenings in the world.

National communal identification in wartime is strengthened by the fact that war is a contest involving two opposing sides. In war, as Elaine Scarry suggests, “each side works to bring the other side to the latter’s perceived level of intolerable injury faster than it is itself brought to its own level of intolerable injury” (Scarry quoted in Rose, 2003: 11). The fierce competition erases any ambivalence in identification, polarizing and clearly delineating identities. The polarization of identities and the removal of ambivalence is a coping mechanism. Smelser (2004) calls it the “splitting effect,” whereby one side of the ambivalence is more or less negated or repressed and the other becomes the whole story. Political polarization occurs when one or more political groups – each having assumed rigid, opposing modes of splitting – confront one another and disagree over the outcome of war. The process of splitting requires both sides to engage in the articulation of difference, “othering” the opponent and creating the “exterior” boundary between “us” and “them.” As noted above, the construction of a boundary generates a “we” feeling where a group of people comes to think of itself as united against a common enemy or as resisting injustice.

The splitting effect can be amplified by the use of older national “we-they” stereotypes available in the cultural repertoire that inspire a will to fight and sacrifice self-interest for the collective good (Hutchinson 2017). The revival of older cleavages is characteristic of “frontier” populations (such as Ukraine) – populations historically settled in “shatter zones” between empires (ibid: 80). These populations periodically face similar geopolitical challenges to their physical and symbolic survival. The excavation of past grievances and memories mobilizes people for warfare and inspires new generations of combatants to take up arms and fight. In the empirical part of the

dissertation, I demonstrate how volunteers dig out past grievances with the Russian empire and the Soviet Union to reinforce the boundary making between Ukraine and Russia and integrate the current war on Donbas into the historic narrative of national struggle against the “old” enemy. The excavation of memories gives continuity and reinforces the boundary between “us” and “them.”

It is important to note that the processes of meaning-making and social becoming through which communities strengthen their national identities are not carried out by the “nation,” because nations are abstractions that lack the agency to act. Abstractions cannot remember, construct myths or produce memories. Instead of nations, Alexander (2004) talks about “carrier groups,” collective agents of social becoming and meaning-making, with a particular talent for articulating claims on behalf of the collective. Carrier groups are situated in particular places in the social structure; since they have legitimacy, the majority population looks up to them as spiritual or community leaders. They broadcast symbolic representations of traumatic social events, past, present and future, to a wider audience, seeking to increase solidarity and connectedness around the experience. As Alexander notes, carrier groups make use of the particular historic and political environment, tapping into the resources on hand and creating a symbolic infrastructure for suffering, injustice and remembrance. Among other things, they engage in commemorative acts and acts of representation.

In so doing, carrier groups create symbolic fields of communication and commemoration around war loss and suffering. The remembrance infrastructure can play a pivotal role in the intensification of national belonging and imbues monuments with sacredness (Anderson 2006; Hutchinson 2017). Their abstractness erases any other type of identity except for national identification (Alexander 2004; Anderson 2006; Hutchinson 2017). People mourn “fallen soldiers” and “heroes” who sacrificed their lives for the sake of the nation. The rituals and public

commemoration, Hutchinson observes, evoke a powerful emotional charge. He writes: “participating in recurring collective rituals tends to give an overarching meaning to otherwise random deaths, recall the dead to life, and restore agency to those who otherwise feel as victims” (2017:76). The complexity of public commemorations lies in understanding whether death is perceived as a loss to the national or local communities (ibid). As I go on to show in the empirical analysis, Ukrainian volunteers, initially employed in emergency assistance, become carrier groups of national identity, engaging in commemorative acts around war loss and suffering. They expanded the “we” circle to a larger audience, building solidarity, connectedness and cohesion around war. Put otherwise, they created the symbolic fields of communication and exchange around which national imaginings take hold.

The symbolic infrastructure for remembrance is inherently gendered and should be analyzed as such (Damousi 2002; Hughes 2005). Examining the representations of the famous female nurse killed during the Great War in Britain, Hughes notes a variety of ways her figure was used to recruit men for the military and to evoke national sentiments and patriotism. The nurse’s portrayals as an “innocent” child and “defenseless” girl intended to enlist more men into the army to defend unprotected women like her. Her representation as “a mature, patriotic, dignified and brave woman” was used in the propaganda to instill a sense of patriotic duty. Other scholars make similar observations about commemoration ceremonies, revealing how their planning and staging is charged with gendered messages that call men and women to unite for the sake of the nation (Bourke 1996). The plasticity of ideas about masculine heroism and female participation allows for the construction of diverse narratives that serve war needs and mobilize national imaginings (Heathorn 2002). The interlocking nature of gender, national and citizenship identities stresses the

need to analyze them simultaneously and integrate a detailed analysis of the gendering of narratives about “nation” and “citizen” reproduced in the war context.

Wartime social mobility can act as a homogenizing and equalizing force. For one thing, mass conscription offers an institutional setting for social and regional bonding. For another, intensified collaboration and altered forms of mobility can change the ways a community views another community and open up a space to overcome stereotypes. War-induced mobility can weaken a sense of social distance among diverse communities, homogenize their narratives about the past and standardize their cultural practices. The “exchange” and “learning” of cultural repertoires can create a sense of cultural similarity that is interpreted through a national lens. As a result, national unity becomes consolidated and particularistic understandings of history and visions for the future become weakened.

In the empirical part of the dissertation, I show how wartime volunteering fostered inter-regional mobility, communication and exchange in Ukraine. My interviews revealed that volunteers from Southern and Eastern Ukraine changed their attitudes towards those from Western Ukraine. In effect, the inter-regional socializing engendered by volunteering allowed the transmission of historical and cultural knowledge across Ukraine, lessening divergent understandings of history and culture. Volunteers, regardless of their place of origin, now think of themselves as “one nation” working towards common goals and sharing a vision for the future. In this case, wartime volunteering became an inter-regional social infrastructure for communication and cooperation, promoting national unity.

War-induced social and regional mobility can also impact language identities. The sociolinguistic scholarship (Blommaert and Rampton 2012; Jaworski and Thurlow 2011) on tourism and mobility helps us understand the wider implications of war mobility on sociolinguistic

identities. Jaworski observes that travelling has an inevitable effect on the sociolinguistic realities of those “on the move”. He argues that in every instant of contact, individuals “negotiate the nature of their experience, the meaning of culture and place, as well as their own relationships and identities” (Jaworski and Thurlow 2011: 261). The language that accompanies and facilitates mobility is also “on the move”, as people bring their styles of speaking and discourses on language into new spaces and exchange them with others. By and large, the language accompanying the speaker interacts with new environments and becomes “re-contextualized” and “re-emoticed.” Valentine, Sporton and Nielsen (2008) add that language practices are situated in everyday settings. As the everyday setting of individuals changes in wartime, with new friendships being made and old ones dissolving, there is an opportunity to remake language practices, and speakers have new choices.

Valentine, Sporton and Nielsen (2008) stress that use of language is linked to the ways people make sense of their identities and affiliations. The renegotiation of national identities amidst war can alter a sense of language belonging and encourage people to change their sociolinguistic practices. These shifts signify changes in language ideologies that index language use with particular meanings. My empirical task is to show how the outbreak of war on Donbas and the use of language as pretext for Russia’s aggression influenced the attitudes towards Ukrainian and Russian languages and what effect it has had on communicative practices of volunteers. To that end, I examine discourses on language in relation to national belonging and state loyalty as well as pay attention to ruptures in socio-linguistic practices of volunteers. I analyze these changes in conjunction with war-induced forms of mobility and exchange that affect language ideologies and linguistic practices.

Format of the dissertation

To address the questions of identity formation and citizenship, the dissertation proceeds as follows.

Chapter 2 discusses the collection of data and points to the transformative nature of fieldwork on the researcher. Much like the civilian volunteers whose lives have been transformed by war, I underwent a personal transformation “in the field,” revising my previous beliefs and developing a capacity for self-reflection. I show that this transformation can be especially profound and painful when dealing with war and trauma.

Chapter 3 provides a concise history of the war and specifies the context in which civilian volunteers operated. I examine Ukraine’s limited state capacity before and during the war, pointing to the state’s inept handling of combatants and civilians at the outset of violence. Using ethnographic evidence, I develop a typology of the tasks undertaken by civilian volunteers to address the state’s limited capacity and trace the evolution of volunteer work over the first year of engagement. In so doing, I situate the processes of identity formation within specific geographies and practices around which the identity formation of volunteers evolved.

Chapter 4 provides information on the demographic profile of volunteers, their motivations for engagement and pathways to volunteering. Contrary to mainstream narratives that posit volunteering as a practice generated primarily by patriotism, I show that for many, volunteering emerged as a coping mechanism to handle the looming uncertainty in the region and the fear of violence spillover to “home cities.” Others became engaged out of humanitarian concerns, responding to the precarity of war-affected individuals and combatants. Combined, Chapters 3 and 4 provide an account of how and why civilian grassroots mobilization in Ukraine unfolded and who got engaged. They set the stage for the following analysis of identity formation in volunteer communities.

Chapter 5 examines the reordering of gender identities in volunteer sites. Situating the discussion of gender identities in Ukraine historically, I show that wartime mobilization realities have reshaped the understanding of men's and women's duty in wartime. Men have been engaged as soldiers, leading to the increasing acceptance of "militarized masculinity" by volunteers, an understanding of manhood in relation to warfare. For their part, women have come to see their responsibility as assisting and supporting men at war, with female volunteers being urged to embrace a model of caregiver femininity. As such, wartime volunteering has had contradictory effects on women's status, resulting in their higher visibility, but limiting their social and political engagement to support and care, thus reifying gender roles.

Chapter 6 focuses on the ways war and volunteering experiences have affected volunteers' national identities. I demonstrate that national identification with Ukraine became the main frame of reference for volunteers who previously identified themselves differently, either in terms of localities where they lived, or in relation to "pan-ethnic identities." This is accompanied by the weakening of localism, regional particularism, pan-Slavism and Sovietness in volunteering communities, all of which were defining features of Ukraine's pre-war social and political landscape. War, violence and dislocation forged new solidarities and loyalties, sharpening the boundaries of belonging around Ukraine and away from Russia.

Chapter 7 shows that fluctuations in national identification and the use of language as a pretext for Russia's aggression towards Ukraine disturbed the well-established language relations and impacted the language identities of civilian volunteers. As a result, many altered their attitudes towards the Ukrainian and Russian languages and, to a lesser degree, changed their linguistic practices. Examining the shifts in language sensibilities and sensitivities, I show the increased

social openness to Ukrainian language among Russophone volunteers and trace the emergence of narratives that decouple language, patriotism and national belonging.

Chapter 8 seeks to make sense of the war-induced reinterpretation of citizen identity by civilian volunteers. It shows that many had a narrowly defined scope of social concerns before the war and an individualistic interpretation of “good citizenship” that precluded broader participation. Wartime engagement expanded their scope of concerns, altered their perception of their own role in society and improved their attitudes towards fellow citizens. Many abandoned their initially negative attitude towards collective action as useless and inefficient, thereby putting their civic identity within a collective framework. Interestingly, however, attitudes about political participation have remained predominantly negative, with the model of community-oriented citizenship gaining prominence.

In conclusion, I discuss how to integrate my empirical findings in a theoretical reflection about collective action and identity formation in wartime. I note the importance of established gender norms, personal and entrepreneurial networks in driving initial engagement under the conditions of limited statehood. I emphasize the role of emotions in mobilizing individuals to get engaged amidst heightened insecurity and precarity. I bring attention to war mobility, war-generated fields of communication and exchange, social relations and geographies of precarity as key factors for understanding the reconfiguration of identities at war. I highlight the usefulness of ethnographic approaches for capturing the subtleties and complexities of identity formation.

Chapter 2. Field Research along the borderlines of war and its impact on the researcher

This chapter provides reflections on ethnographic fieldwork conducted among civilian volunteers preoccupied with war in Ukraine. First, it addresses the issue of research design, focusing on a preparatory stage of the project and on data collection methods. In particular, it discusses access to the field in terms of interviewing respondents and navigating the settings that blend peaceful and violent contexts. Second, it engages the literature on emotional aspects of conducting fieldwork in conflict settings and sheds light on emotional responses to fieldwork on war and trauma. It stresses that reflexivity and self-forgiveness can help researchers reconcile conflicting emotions and commitments presented by “the field” and to address them in a way that ensures the integrity of research and researchers. Third, it examines how ethnographic studies can be formative for researchers, altering different facets of their identity. I reflect on how my ethnographic study of the war in Ukraine influenced my sense of national belonging and community engagement. To do so, I engage the literature on the shifting positionality of the researcher in the field and how these shifts open up the possibility of renegotiating our subjectivities.

Fieldwork and methodological choices

My first visit to Odesa and Dnipropetrovs’k lasted two months in the summer of 2014. The events in Ukraine were unfolding rapidly and unexpectedly. The shocking annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the ensuing violence on Donbas created an environment of fear and uncertainty across Ukraine. It was especially noticeable in the Southern and Eastern regions; internal tensions among pro-Russian and pro-Ukraine supporters in the spring of 2014 were high, and the danger of Russian invasion loomed large. Narratives on “re-establishing Novorossiia,” a

historical-geopolitical region under the domination of the Russian empire in the 19th century, kept pro-Ukraine supporters alarmed and anxious.

I spent a few weeks in Odesa, “learning” the field and establishing contacts on the ground. Back then, rigorous planning was impossible because in a post-Maidan Ukraine, too many things were in flux, and the general unpredictability of events jeopardized the possibility of conducting full-scale fieldwork in the region. The amassment of Russian regular troops around the Ukrainian border and the military exercises conducted in Transnistria and other regions bordering Ukraine were constant reminders of instability, making it difficult to make research plans and decide on the methods of data collection.

After the tragedy of 2 May 2014 in Odesa, people were unwilling to let strangers into their networks or to discuss anything related to their activities.¹³ The access to some networks was closed because of security considerations, but other networks were more open to strangers through personal referrals. Thanks to my acquaintances in Odesa, I was able to attend the meeting of a committee linking pro-Ukraine groups. This committee met once a week to coordinate the various groups’ actions and develop a common strategy. It united members of civil society organisations and pro-Ukraine political parties to ensure the territorial protection of Odesa and challenge corrupt practices of local authorities. Altogether, 16 organisations were represented, with most concerns centering on security, corruption and local politics. Throughout the following year, I observed some local activists and networks re-orienting their activities towards helping the army and voluntary battalions and engaging in other tasks related to the outbreak of war. This helped me settle on my research question, shifting my focus to war-spurred grassroots mobilization in the frontline regions and the effects of this engagement on the identities of civilian volunteers.

¹³ In May 2014, Odesa experienced the most violent clashes between pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian camps outside the conflict zone; it resulted in the deaths of almost 40 individuals, with many more injured.

While pre-fieldwork was useful for acquiring a basic familiarity with the sites of research and subsequent recruitment of respondents, it did not sufficiently prepare me to conduct ethnographic fieldwork. In retrospect, I know I had a simplified understanding of what an ethnographic study entails and what ethical and practical challenges it can present. More profoundly, I did not anticipate how “the field” could affect me, reconfiguring my national identification and making me engage in self-reflectivity over modes of engagement outside of academia. I was also unprepared to deal with the emotional demands of the fieldwork and found myself increasingly identifying with war-inflicted suffering in Ukraine. In what follows, I discuss these issues in more detail, drawing on the insights of other ethnographers to substantiate my personal experiences and discussing some of their suggestions on how to ensure the integrity of research and the researcher working on traumatic topics.

For my fieldwork, I identified three sites of research – Odesa, Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovs’k - the cities where voluntary engagement seemed very dynamic but whose unfolding was unexpected. I focused on Southern and Eastern Ukraine because I wanted to capture the emergence of civilian networks and identity formation processes within them in regions previously characterized as having low levels of public participation and ambiguous national identification (Birch 2000; Shulman 2004; Arel 2006). It is important to emphasize that volunteer networks mushroomed across Ukraine, with many developing interregional and international ties. Given the focus of my research, networks in other regions of Ukraine and abroad mostly remained outside the scope of this dissertation. Similarly, the wider societal support of volunteer work is only briefly addressed.

Research sites and data collection

To collect data, I spent five months in Southern and Eastern Ukraine, May-September 2015, studying civilian volunteer networks. Even though the duration of fieldwork was relatively short, I consider my work to be ethnographic in nature. As Schatz (2009) notes, ethnographic studies are defined by two core principles. The first, participant observation, refers to immersion in a community under analysis, thereby allowing the researcher to observe certain modes of being, acting and thinking. In simple terms, it enables the researcher to learn about the activities of people in a natural setting, through exposure to routine life. The second, an “ethnographic sensibility,” pertains to the development of insight into the meanings and inner logic of a phenomenon. According to Schatz, an “ethnographic sensibility” goes beyond face-to-face interactions to generate deeper insights into the social world of research participants. It gives the researcher a better grasp of the context of unfamiliar practices and makes it possible to substantiate and contextualize certain findings. As Kubik (2009) points out, the focus on an ‘ethnographic sensibility’ allows more flexibility in terms of the duration of field work. It also expands the tools of inquiry in a way that allows the researcher to blend different modes of analysis to generate insights about the object of study. These scholars note that the duration of fieldwork can vary, but should be sufficient to develop an ethnographic sensibility to make claims about the issue at stake. Instead of focusing on the duration of fieldwork, ethnographers are encouraged to engage in discussions of the transparency and accountability of data collection and reflect on the power dynamics and ethical dilemmas of fieldwork (Salter 2013). Tackling these issues is important to understand what kind of data ethnographers produce and how, and also to ensure scholarly rigour.

By these measures, my five-month fieldwork in Southern and Eastern Ukraine qualifies as an ethnographic study as it deployed participant observation, even if for a relatively short period of time, with attention to the empirical complexity of volunteer communities under investigation.

I found ethnography a particularly useful approach to studying civilian volunteer networks. As Caddick et al. (2017) note, ethnographic work helps us deal with experiences of war, displacement and unknowable dimensions of trauma when these experiences are far beyond “our own horizons” of knowledge. This insight resonated with me, as I had a limited knowledge of the realities of war-induced volunteering and sought to learn about it through immersion. In addition, studying a recently emerging social and political phenomenon, in this case, civilian mobilization amidst war, meant there was virtually no academic literature. In such a case, immersion was necessary to produce data for critical engagement with the object of study. Finally, my focus on “situated learning” of identities required attention to the context and environment within which volunteer work is conducted and self-narratives are constructed. Ethnographic inquiry is best suited for generating insights about “situated” experiences, as it allows us to immerse ourselves in the realities of the people we study and develop an ethnographic sensibility to interpret encounters in the field.

I opted for multi-sited research across three cities to better capture narratives emerging across various volunteer networks, as well as the relationships and connections among them. As Marcus (1995) notes, an ethnography of grand systems from below is best conducted by connecting multiple sites of research and tracking continuities within them. This kind of research produces ethnographic insights on the process of grand system formation and also constitutes an ethnography of that grand system itself. This insight is applicable to the study of national, language, gender and civic identities; such a study simultaneously reflects on the formation of the grand systems and regimes intertwined with these identities.

How exactly can ethnography contribute to the study of nationhood and the formation of national identities? Bonikowski (2016: 428) suggests that nationhood should be studied from

“the bottom up as a set of intersubjective meanings and affective orientations that give people a sense of self and guide their social interactions and political choices.” Ethnography can generate micro-level perspectives and identify collective narratives that shed light on vernacular conceptions of the nation. An ethnographic sensibility allows us to trace the importance of the nation in everyday life, so that we may see how national identities are lived, expressed and negotiated in daily interactions (Bonikowski 2016; Seliverstova 2017). Bonikowski stresses that the focus of investigation from the bottom up is not political ideologies *per se*, but the collective narratives, symbolic representations and cultural schemas that, under certain circumstances, crystalize into self-conscious ideologies. To understand how this happens, we first need to understand the salience and meaning of the nation in everyday life. Goode and Stroup (2015) echo this point, advocating an “everyday nationalism” approach. They contend that the academic study of nationalism should focus less on elites and more on the quotidian practices by which national identities are enacted. Among other things, attention should be directed towards the processes of “ethnicization” (Goode and Stroup 2015) by which material object and symbols acquire meaning in the national(ist) framework and act to delineate the nation and imbue it with meaning and legitimacy.

The same argument can be applied to language. As the production of national identities is inherently linked to language ideologies and sociolinguistic practices, ethnography is crucial for generating insights. Blommaert and Rampton (2012) say an ethnographic sensibility is useful to study language belonging and communicative practices. It is particularly useful to apply ethnography to the apparatus of linguistic and discourse analysis to investigate, rather than assume, the context of communication. According to them, the meaning of language ideologies and communication “takes shape within specific places, activities, social relations, interactional

histories, textual trajectories, institutional regimes and cultural ideologies produced and constructed by embodied agents with expectations and repertoires that have to be grasped ethnographically” (2012: 20). As such, ethnography provides a powerful tool to study both language ideologies and sociolinguistic practices. Pinpointing continuities and discontinuities in communicative practices of civilian volunteers and the social spaces within which they occur or are enacted presents an opportunity to understand shifts in language ideologies and to explain how the sites of volunteering and war mobility enable change.

Similarly, ethnography is useful for drawing insights about the production of gender identities and gender regimes from below. Cornwall and Lindisfarne (2016) note that ethnographers are equipped to study subtle and complex processes of gendering in the interactions in a particular setting. Attention to settings and nuance are productive for documenting alternative or emerging forms of masculinity and femininity and the ways they are enacted or dislodged. As I explain in the chapter on shifting gender identities, war and wartime engagement have reconfigured the “gendered” self of Ukrainian volunteers, with female volunteers embracing a more feminized and essentialized interpretation of what it means to be a woman. Understanding how exactly the shift in discourses, practices, and bodily performances occurs requires an ethnographic insight, one that can pinpoint connections and discontinuities with previous ways of gendering self. Ethnography can also reveal tensions, contradictions and hybridity in the production of gendered identities during wars and in military institutions (MacLeish 2015). Feminist scholarship has demonstrated the richness and rigour that can be achieved in the study of gender and war, when ethnography is employed as a tool of inquiry.

To generate insights into the production of identities in volunteer communities, I employed participation observation. I frequented volunteering sites across the three cities. Among

other things, this included fundraising spaces where volunteers got together to collect money and funds for those serving on the front. I spent time with female volunteers knitting camouflage nets and organizing care packages for the front. In Dnipropetrovs'k, I visited the comfort zone arranged by volunteers for combatants travelling home from the frontlines. I attended brainstorming sessions of volunteers where they discussed their strategies of cooperation with state authorities and the future direction of their engagement. On a few occasions, I turned up at publicly organized protests where volunteers raised their concerns about the social and political issues faced by combatants and displaced persons. I was able to join volunteers for a three-day interregional recreation trip meant to give volunteers some time to socialize, rest and share their experiences. In Dnipropetrovs'k, I attended a Ukraine-wide forum where volunteers from across Ukraine shared their best practices and discussed new initiatives.

By immersing myself in spaces of volunteer engagement, I wanted to uncover different layers of volunteering, including those less visible ones. As feminist scholars note, what is visible and invisible is highly political (Woodward 2015; Enloe 2010). The choices of how to spatialize research sites, where to look for public engagement and how to define civic and political action have important implications for the kind of observations we make and the conclusions we arrive at. Enloe (2010) makes the point that moving beyond general presumptions about the “spaces” where politics or civic acts happen and choosing, for example, a beauty salon as a place to investigate wartime politics has profound implications for the ways we form our understanding of the costs of war, charting modes of participation and measuring their effects. The dismissal of commonly trivialized sites as unsuitable for research draws on our unexamined assumptions of what constitutes a political battleground and what qualifies as a political act (Enloe 2010; see also Jones 1994). Seemingly unimportant everyday acts and choices have significance for “big

politics,” even though they often remain unexplored. Participant observation is crucial for tracing less visible aspects of volunteering, and I was particularly interested in observing the mundane interactions of volunteers with those they helped. These observations generated insights into the affective sides of engagement, the emotional labour invested in volunteering and the various kinds of social bridging in volunteer networks.

Along with participant observation, I conducted a series of interviews, primarily with civilian volunteers, but also with the internally displaced persons they helped. Interviews proved to be an appropriate research technique, especially for documenting volunteers’ self-narratives of changes in their national, civic and gender identification in the course of their engagement, as well as their narratives of their reasons for engagement and what sustained it. As Schatz (2009) notes, in-depth interviews generate insider perspectives and tell us less about the events than about their meaning. Portelli remarks that oral interviews “tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did” (2002: 67). Dunn (2017) articulates a relationship between personal narrative, the self and the narrating context. She contends that the constitutive power of narratives lies in how they combine talk about the self with the interactive positioning of the self. Through narratives, individuals do not just talk about “self”; they also position themselves vis-à-vis others. In addition, narratives have the self-constitutive power of transforming selves and reorienting them in relation to larger societal discourses or master narratives (Dunn 2017). In this way, personal narratives are important for shaping an individual’s longer-term identity. Rhodes and Brown (2005) add that narratives are pivotal to sense-making because they aid comprehension and suggest a causal order for events in a potentially chaotic and disorganized life as envisioned by the narrator. By examining volunteers’ narratives about “self,” the histories of past engagement and how they related to those on the front,

I was able to see how civilian volunteers positioned themselves vis-à-vis nation, state and citizenship discourses. It also showed how new gendered solidarities arose in volunteer communities, gendering the conceptions of nation and citizenship at the same time

To gather information about the impact of volunteering on civilians themselves, their sense of national belonging, and civic responsibility, I interviewed 95 volunteers actively engaged in assisting with the war effort and dealing with the humanitarian consequences of war. This included those supporting the army, volunteering at the hospitals and taking care of internally displaced persons. The timing of interviews shed light on the ways of thinking and experiences of volunteers during their engagement. I also collected the interviews of civilian volunteers in local media outlets and followed volunteers' posts on social media to get a better understanding of the scope of their assistance and their main concerns. I used conversational and semi-structured interviews, mainly with volunteers, but also with internally displaced people and community residents for data collection. I did not attempt to construct a representative sampling as it was not essential for my study, but I did my best to interview volunteers engaged in various types of volunteer work. Thus, the sampling of voluntary networks was stratified to reflect the diversity of tasks undertaken by volunteers.

The fieldwork was designed to gather information about the formation of voluntary networks, their social and occupational composition, with a focus on the impact of volunteering on the identities and life trajectories of those engaged. Although I followed a general questionnaire to structure interviews, respondents were encouraged to elaborate where they saw fit and to discuss topics not included in my questionnaire. Given the limited time and space, I prioritized those individuals who were actively engaged in volunteer efforts. Those who disengaged or switched to other types of activities are not accounted for in this study.

It should be noted that this research does not depict the experiences of volunteers in totality. In fact, ethnographers convincingly argue that it is a futile exercise, as our observations are always partial and the reality always resists our interpretations. As Benzecry (2015: 26) contends, “The reality is multiple, contradictory and in flux and we make sense out of it through our theoretical choices and theoretical frames.” He further notes that recognizing the impossibility of total knowledge should not stop us from making attempts at understanding the world around us. Instead, it should make us aware that our studies inevitably objectify the lives of others and present them in reified and partial ways, while opening up “the horizons of intelligibility.” As scholars select and systematize the narratives of others, they should simultaneously reflect on the validity of selected data and open themselves up to theoretical options to analyze ethnographic evidence (Benzecry 2015: 27). Similarly, Haraway (1988) stresses the need to focus on the specificity and partiality of the knowledges we produce to avoid the false impression that our insights transcend all limits and provide a generalizable vision of the reality.

In the next sections, I engage the literature on the positionality of the researcher to reflect on the specificity of knowledge construction in relation to volunteer communities, focusing on access to respondents, the emotional entanglements of fieldwork and their impact on the researcher.

Accessing ‘the field’: the positionality of the researcher

Ethnographers stress that the positionality of the researcher shapes the process of data collection in various ways, including the types of testimonies we get to hear, the sorts of spaces we get access to and the kinds of stories we get to tell. The concept of positionality refers to the social space one occupies in relation to “the other” (Merriam et al. 2001; Greene 2014). In the past, positionality was conceptualized along an “insider/outsider” axis, with insider research defined as

“the study of one’s own group or society” (Naples quoted in Greene 2014: 2) and the researcher as having *a priori* intimate knowledge of the community and its members. In contrast, outsider research is undertaken by those who do not belong to or do not possess *a priori* knowledge of the group under investigation (ibid).

This binary understanding of positionality has been severely critiqued. The scholarship on intersectionality has convincingly argued that the ways one is positioned in relation to others are multiple, fluid and power-ridden. Internal variations within cultures and power differentials in social hierarchies position individuals differently within a culture. Many factors, including race, gender, education, class, and regional background, shape and can outweigh cultural identity (Narayan 1993; Merriam et al. 2001). Accordingly, Narayan (1993: 671) proposes viewing the status of the researcher “in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations.” Further highlighting the complexity of positionality, some scholars emphasize that the researcher’s positionality is negotiated, not given (Merriam et al. 2001; Darling 2014). These insights lead to a more flexible understanding of the researcher’s status in the field, one that is not static and can shift in response to field dynamics and the researcher’s efforts. These critiques indicate that we can never fully be part of one community or another. Our varied and shifting affiliations and emotional attachments emphasize the complexity of relating to others.

Reflecting on my access to the field, I know that my Ukrainian background did not automatically grant me insider status; nor was it particularly relevant for collecting data in volunteer communities in the frontline regions. On the one hand, growing up in Ukraine and speaking both Ukrainian and Russian eased my access to the field and facilitated communication with research participants. While there were culture-bound phrases that did not need interpretation

and non-verbalized answers that I was able to understand very well, an immediate bond did not materialize between me and my research participants based on shared nationality. Several field dynamics and issues positioned me as an outsider. This included regional background, language, professional affiliations, and socio-economic characteristics. In addition, “the situated” nature of volunteer engagement positioned me as an outsider to volunteer practices. I discuss these dynamics further in this section.

Conducting fieldwork in Southern and Eastern Ukraine brought to surface the salience of regional identities in Ukraine. My Western Ukrainian background meant that my understanding of national belonging, language, culture, and Ukrainian history differed from those living in the Southern and Eastern regions of Ukraine. While my Western Ukrainian background was never an issue in communicating with volunteers, most of my respondents sensed my “regional otherness” in my slight Ukrainian accent while speaking Russian and asked questions about my origin. In Ukraine, language use and regional identities are heavily politicized, with individuals often having regionally-based stereotypes about their collocutors. My regional background and regionally distinctive history and values distanced me from my research participants and challenged my “insider status.” In addition, the specificity of war experiences and “the situated” knowledge the civilian volunteers had acquired over the years of war in Ukraine had profoundly changed their lives, equipping them with knowledge and skills that I lacked.

My gender also dictated access to the field, albeit in implicit ways. Since women generally elicit less suspicion in conflict settings, I felt that I was able to access volunteer sites and observe volunteer work with more ease than a male researcher. On a few occasions, when there were security guards by volunteer centers, my ID was not checked and I was granted entrance with little scrutiny and questioning. My gender influenced the dynamics of interviewing as well. Since

women do the bulk of volunteer work in Ukraine, the majority of my respondents were female volunteers. I found I was able to establish good rapport with them, and the gendered expectation of women as being more attuned to understanding the emotional sides of volunteering made my respondents more open to discussing charged accounts of war engagement with me. I also performed emotional work during interviews, attending to the stories and sentiments of my respondents. This work is inherently gendered, as women are understood to have a natural aptitude for empathy and compassion. At times, however, my gender and age could be a liability. A few times, I was referred to as a “girl from Canada” or a “girl working on her dissertation” and heard gendered jokes about marriage and conducting research. This made me concerned that I might not be taken seriously. While I do not know if my concerns were well founded, I started comporting myself in a more self-conscious manner in volunteer sites and evaded the types of behavior that could be interpreted as “too feminine” or naive. Cupples (2002) writes that female researchers may “try to appear genderless and downplay their femininity not to defy stereotypes or ward off uncalled attention” (386). During her own fieldwork she felt that her sexual and gendered subjectivities shifted, and she found herself renegotiating her femininity and performing differently. Similarly, Thomas (2017) reports engaging in gender identity work during an ethnographic study of prenatal medicine, muting hegemonic masculinity traits and enacting an alternative masculinity to get access to the field. These shifts highlight how gender is performed differently in different settings, how the researcher can renegotiate “the gendered self” during the fieldwork, and how this renegotiation is constrained by the perceptions of others.

Access to respondents

Access to volunteer sites and respondents was easy. Some volunteers agreed to be interviewed to give voice to their experiences and to express the pain of displacement and war.

This reasoning was quite apparent in my interview with a displaced female volunteer from Crimea; she recalled in great detail the loss and despair she felt during the annexation of Crimea and noted that her husband, a Ukrainian navy officer, “wanted her to tell during the interview that a lot of military men stayed in Crimea for family reasons, not out of loyalty to Russia.” During this interview, I sensed my respondent wanted to make visible the struggle of remaining loyal to Ukraine in Crimea and the suffering associated with displacement. As Wood (2006) notes, the willingness of individuals in conflict settings to talk at length with a researcher is common to many ethnographies of civil war and has to do with an experienced trauma that “suffocates” many and needs to be let out. Given the willingness to talk, I did not feel that my research “re-traumatized” any of my respondents, including those who had been displaced. On the contrary, I felt that an ability to talk about traumatic experiences might have been a productive outlet for grief and emotional turmoil. To further decrease the risk of re-traumatization, I informed my respondents that they could refuse to answer certain questions and could decide to stop the interview at any point. As Wood (2006) states, this gives interviewees a sense of control over the interview and its content, ensuring that they do not talk about issues that are too painful or discomfoting.

Most individuals I contacted felt proud of the work volunteers were doing and wanted to share this appreciation. Some wanted their stories and the stories of their fellow volunteers to be known and acknowledged. Tatiana, a woman I met at a camouflage knitting site, is a good example. When I accidentally met her while I was waiting for a scheduled interview, she immediately took an interest in my research project saying that she “too had been wondering over the profound impact of volunteer engagement on her life and the life of others she met” (Fieldwork Notes, 8 July 2015). In the weeks following our initial encounter, Tatiana arranged a series of interviews with the women she met through volunteering and encouraged them to share their

stories with me. This particular set of interviews helped me develop a better understanding of the relations, connections and emotional entanglements of research participants with those they helped and among themselves.

Others were open to talking to me because their friends asked them to. I extensively relied on the contacts I established during the pre-fieldwork to recruit participants for interviews, and it facilitated my access to interviewees. I also reviewed local media coverage of volunteer work to identify the most active volunteers in each city. Individuals engaged in volunteer work pride themselves on being open, transparent and approachable, in contrast to state officials who are often seen as shrouded in bureaucracy and unwilling to engage with strangers. This image of “approachability” helped me to establish ties on the ground in the summer of 2015 and reactivate the connections I had developed during pre-fieldwork.

The geopolitical situation undoubtedly eased access to my respondents, as Canada has been seen as Ukraine’s strongest ally and best friend on the international scene.¹⁴ Some volunteer centers I visited had a Canadian flag displayed, a testament to the support received from the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada. In attempts to fundraise more money in the diaspora and raise awareness of the developments in Ukraine, some volunteers toured Canada in 2014 and 2015. I met one of them in Ottawa, subsequently reconnecting during fieldwork for an interview. In light of this, my affiliation with a Canadian university was seen positively and might have facilitated contacts with volunteers. I was frequently asked questions about Canada and the Ukrainian diaspora and even got requests to be photographed with a Canadian flag.

¹⁴ Since 2014, Canada has committed to providing over \$140 million in bilateral development assistance to support Ukraine’s economic reforms, and over \$88 million to advance democracy, human rights and the rule of law (Canadian International Assistance 2017). Additional funds were allocated for humanitarian assistance in the war. Canada has provided non-lethal military equipment to Ukraine’s armed forces, deployed 200 Canadian Armed Forces personnel to Ukraine to Ukrainian forces, and engaged in other types of cooperation with the Ukrainian army under the auspices of the Military Training and Cooperation Program (MTCP) (Canada-Ukraine Relations 2016).

Canada's support might have created expectations of my research that I did not anticipate. I was asked about "the value of my research" and whether it could potentially "encourage Canada to increase assistance to Ukraine," including lethal weapons that many in Ukraine hoped for. One of my respondents noted that among other things she was interested in talking to me because she hoped that I "would talk to others about the work her network has been doing," generating more support for their efforts. I assume similar reasoning might have been present in other encounters with volunteers who saw "some benefits" in participation in terms of increasing the visibility of their work and getting more funds. Attempts to exploit participation in research have been noted by a number of scholars. For example, Browne (2003) discusses power dynamics between the researcher and the "researched," and Jansson and Nikolaidou (2013) examine attempts to leverage professional and institutional identities during fieldwork encounters. To address possible expectations of my research, I always disclosed that my work was purely academic and was not intended to influence policies or community engagement or bring any other benefits. Of course, it is hard to judge whether my respondents found this disclosure convincing.

In a few instances, I encountered distrust of the intent of my research and the audience of dissemination. One volunteer refused to be interviewed because she was "suspicious of research projects like that," especially when questions are asked about "attitudes towards the state." A volunteer battalion fighter present during this conversation kept asking what organisation I was working for and who the intended audience of my research was. I later found that out that both were associated with the Azov battalion, whose leaders come from a neo-Nazi political party called the Social-National Alliance (SNA) (Risch 2015). As this incident demonstrates, the ideologies of volunteers might affect their willingness to participate in research, with those ascribing to radical

views being less open to discuss their work. Understanding these recruitment dynamics is important because they point to whose voices and stories get represented in research.

It should be noted that the ideologies of volunteers are not the only obstacle when it comes to establishing trust. Among many other things, suspicion of researchers and their work can be linked to perceptions of the professional identity of the researcher. During the fieldwork, I noted a lack of understanding of my discipline - political science - with some associating my work with “political technologists” – an industry of political manipulation thriving in the former Soviet states (Wilson 2011) and a few others referring to me as “a journalist.” This disciplinary misrecognition might stem from the fact that in the Soviet period, political science as a separate discipline did not exist and Ukrainian political scientists at a general level “may not understand what contemporary political science is all about, what methods it uses, and what questions it asks” (Kudelia 2012 and Umland 2013 quoted in Shevel 2015: 25). This creates a tendency to see political science as an opinion-based and interpretative exercise among the academic community in Ukraine and among Ukrainians at large. In addition, Osyn (2015) argued that political scientists in Ukraine are exploited by the domestic neo-patrimonial political regime – a tendency that might have influenced the perception of my respondents about my disciplinary specialisation.

As our professional occupation shapes our perception of others, a misunderstanding of political science and intellectual preoccupations might have impacted my status in the field. Commenting on my academic affiliation, one individual stated seriously “I know, you are taught how to hypnotize people and all sorts of methods how to influence the psyche of others.” I tried to counter these negative perceptions by broadening my academic affiliation to social sciences and explaining the essence of my research project in detail. In this way, I hoped to avoid being labeled a “political technologist” or being implicitly associated with “political experts” employed by

political parties to advance their image and reputation. As Wolf (1993) contends, creating and negotiating identity in the field can pose a challenge. She found herself lying about certain aspects of her familial life and represented herself in a dishonest way to develop trust and acceptance. While she experienced a sense of discomfort doing this, she concluded that naming and recognizing these contradictions constitute the first step in any attempt to begin confronting them head-on and experimenting with other methods. We need to be attentive to how we formulate and leverage our identities, including our professional and institutional affiliations and personal identities (Jansson and Nikolaidou 2013).

While it was relatively easy to gain access to respondents, conducting interviews was challenging. In part, it had to do with the realities and dynamics of volunteering. I frequently interviewed my respondents at volunteering sites, as it was more convenient and allowed them to chat with me while staying on duty. While I gladly accepted the invitation, it meant the volunteers were often distracted by calls and requests, and our interviews were constantly interrupted. In some volunteering sites, we had to converse in outside pavilions (*besedkas*) with no privacy from onlookers. Every few minutes, someone would stop by to listen to what we were talking about and interject comments. We would sometimes be asked to babysit a child of an internally displaced woman tending to her duties. As I was told, babysitting is one among many free support services volunteers provide to displaced women desperately needing time to attend a job interview or run errands. I had to work on becoming comfortable with the collective, group-oriented culture of war volunteering in Ukraine.

Even though it was difficult to regulate interviews and stay focused, I was not concerned about the interruptions in terms of data collection and recording. In fact, I came to see them as telling a good deal about the nature of volunteering itself, its profoundly social character and

dynamic pace. The openness and willingness of volunteers to collectively answer questions attested to the collective nature of meaning making in volunteer communities. At times, I was able to observe the interactions between the predominantly female volunteers and male combatants, taking note of new gender solidarities. Similarly, spending time at centers for internally displaced persons taught me more about the ways volunteers help out those fleeing violence, sometimes in seemingly small but nonetheless important ways. My concerns, however, were about the ability of my respondents to discuss personal issues and accounts of events in environments with no privacy. On a few occasions, I noted how volunteers filtered each other's accounts during conversations and pointed out the issues "that should not be discussed" outside volunteer circles, especially topics of tension and fragmentation in volunteer networks.

One of the ethical dilemmas I faced with interviews was confidentiality. I asked all those I interviewed whether they wanted their identity to be kept confidential. Most agreed to speak openly to me and indicated that they authorized having their names linked to their testimony. I interpreted their willingness to disclose their identity as a desire to be acknowledged for the work they had been doing and as a rejection of fear. Some had previously faced threats or were shamed for doing war-related volunteer work. Volunteer centers in Odesa and Kharkiv were targets of "intimidation explosions," with explosives set at night, not to hurt but to elicit fear among volunteers.¹⁵ In this environment, disclosing one's identity could be interpreted as a rejection of being frightened, as an act of resistance against those who tried to dissuade them from volunteering. Nevertheless, I decided to conceal the identity of most respondents, indicating only first names or concealing the identities altogether. In doing so, I intended to avoid situations when respondents would disagree with my interpretation of their stories or the attention I brought to

¹⁵ From December to May 2015, there were 6 explosions in Odesa targeted at pro-Ukraine volunteer centers or activists (Terakty v Odesi 2015), with the total number reaching over 20 attacks.

some aspects of volunteering. At the same time, this decision made me feel uneasy because I did not let my respondents make their own choice, thus wielding my power over their stories.

While ethnographers discuss in detail how to ensure the anonymity of respondents (Wood, 2006), the question of whether the researcher should impose the right to anonymity is seldom addressed. The imposition of anonymity testifies to the micro-level operations of power present in the process of scholarly writing, and better understanding of these power relations are crucial for ethically sound research. Sjaak van der Geest (2003) discusses the struggle with confidentiality and pseudonyms' "ethical paternalism," wondering whether she should have been less concerned over the anonymity of respondents, some of whom stated their willingness to be identified and have their names and stories remembered. Similarly, Vanderstaay (2005) calls our obsessive worries about "exploiting" research participants in situations when they find the terms of research satisfactory problematic and "patronizing," as researchers take the liberty of speaking for individuals, instead of focusing on issues that matter to research participants.

The elusiveness of peace and stability in the frontline regions

My fieldwork took place during a period of relative stability, in contrast to my experience in the field a year earlier. By and large, this was due to the ceasefire agreements signed in September 2014 and February 2015 in Minsk. While shelling continued daily during the summer of 2015, the scale and intensity had substantively decreased. Occasionally, fighting escalated, putting in jeopardy the sustainability of the Minsk Protocol, but the violence never returned to its initial level. A year into the war, many civilian networks were well established, with volunteers publicly fundraising money for war-related needs and discussing their engagement in local media outlets and on social media to increase the visibility of their work. The inherently public and social nature of volunteering helped me identify the most active individuals in each city and establish

contact with them for research purposes. The publicity made me believe that my respondents did not face increased risk if they participated in the research project.

However, the feeling of safety in the field, especially in environments permeated by conflict, is elusive at best. Even in relatively peaceful and stable research sites, risks are present in ways difficult to anticipate. In these instances, the researchers have to rely on accounts of local residents and to depend on their perceptions of safety. While my sites of research were “peaceful” terrains, recent upheavals and clashes were engrained in them. In Kharkiv, for example, pro-Russia street graffiti, often painted over with Ukrainian slogans, revealed the tensions simmering in the city. In addition, I was getting conflicting messages about the level of safety there, with some reassuring me it was a “safe city” and others warning me not “to wear pro-Ukraine t-shirts” late at night and to avoid public places during important holidays. In Odesa, volunteer sites were frequent targets of “intimidation” attacks with explosives planted at night to threaten those helping the army. Two of these explosions occurred during my fieldwork – one in Odesa and another in Kharkiv.

In Dnipropetrovs’k, one of the incidents suggested the tensions and risks associated with volunteering for the army. During my stay, I rented an apartment listed “for sale,” and potential buyers occasionally visited it. During one such visit, an out of town friend engaged in a conversation with a former policeman looking to buy the apartment. He was shocked to learn that my friend came to Dnipropetrovs’k to volunteer, “without any money being offered” and noted that she should not tell anyone about the intent of her visit as it “might elicit suspicion.” His skepticism echoed a broader distrust of war engagement, with some convinced the volunteers enriched themselves by volunteering or built political capital for personal gains. In addition, he warned my friend against speaking Ukrainian “not to stand out”; “The city is full of pro-Russian

criminal networks,” he said, who could retaliate if they heard someone speaking Ukrainian or knew that person was helping the army. These occasional warnings, “snippets” of information about the perception of safety, make it incredibly difficult for a researcher to estimate the safety of the environment.

Conducting research on civilian volunteers whose engagement was spurred by war situated me in a somewhat odd environment. On the one hand, I collected information in “peaceful” regions, thus not directly exposing myself to the dangers of war. On the other hand, physical, social and discursive borders between war-torn and peaceful spaces are never clearly delineated. Across disciplines, scholars reject standardised perspectives that reify war and oppose the categories of “war” and “peace.” Feminist thinkers, for example, say we can name and make visible and intelligible the practices of wartime only if we reject stark distinctions between war and peace, front and home, civilian and military.¹⁶ Scheper-Hughes (2007: 161) adds that violence “cannot be understood solely in its physicality – physical force, assault, or in the infliction of pain. Violence also includes assaults on the personhood, dignity, or sense of worth or value of the victim.” This set of scholarship stresses that wars and violence are not linear and quantifiable; making sense of them requires attention to the blurriness of borders between war and peace.

The porous borders of war were visible in the context of war volunteering, with civilian volunteers circulating between different war and peace realities. These included: physical spaces, with volunteers travelling back and forth to the front; emotional attachments between my respondents and war-impacted populations; and discursive practices and vocabulary used to talk

¹⁶ See Herman’s (1997) insightful analysis of the continuities of violence and similarities between domestic violence and political violence; or everyday forms of violence we face and the violence soldiers face on the front. Herman argues against rigid distinctions between different forms of violence and builds on different sets of literature on trauma and violence to show violence as a continuum. She also reveals the striking sameness of the survivors’ experiences in the aftermath of violence.

about war-related experiences. In fact, the blurriness between and the fluidity of war and peace realities were essential to my fieldwork. Once, I was invited to join one of my respondents as she accompanied the parents of a missing soldier for body identification at a local morgue. I was told that the soldier was missing for a year before his body was located and delivered for identification. This invitation generated some agitation and hesitancy. I doubted whether my presence would be appropriate and worried that witnessing this tragic encounter would be too disturbing to bear. My imagination painted a horrific picture of a dead body, decaying with pieces missing and falling apart. Eventually, I was relieved from making the decision, as my respondent had second thoughts about inviting me. She felt that I would be unprepared to handle the experience, especially as there was no information on “what shape the body was” and “whether it would be naked or in a plastic bag.” This invitation was a stark reminder of the rawness and horror of war, especially how it spreads outside the immediate physical space of fighting to mark “peaceful” spaces with death and loss.

On another occasion, I was invited to join volunteers on a trip to the front. One of the volunteers suggested I should go and see “with my own eyes” how volunteers delivered help in the war zone. He wanted me to familiarize myself with the destitution of the army firsthand instead of relying on someone’s accounts. My attempts to elicit more information about the trip and the route were not successful – I was simply reassured that it was “safe” and I “should not worry.” “Well, it’s not really safe anywhere,” my respondent added. That same day, the OSCE reported that the shelling in our target destination Mar’ivka, in Donetsk oblast, had intensified, with heavy artillery brought back to the contact line. The exact route and the departure timing were not communicated ahead of time – in part for security reasons, but also because volunteers often change their plans depending on the situation at the front. I was supposed to travel with two

volunteers, one an Afghan war veteran and the other a local farmer. Eventually, the time of departure was disclosed – 3 a.m. As I was told, travelling at night with low visibility stops volunteers from being “easy targets.” While I ultimately rejected the invitation, I joined these volunteers during a subsequent trip, as I was curious about their work. I wanted to see what was going in the warzone and expected a trip to the front to be revelatory. While I did not know what exactly the trip was supposed to reveal, I felt compelled to accept the invitation.

My hesitancy in both instances points to my need to balance my own safety with my desire to study the milieu of volunteering and my personal entanglements in the ongoing war in Ukraine. Leibing and McLean (2007) call such considerations “the shadow side of fieldwork,” emphasizing that fieldwork often blends the borders of personal life and formal ethnography. They contend that the experience of fieldwork is inseparable from our personal lives and is inevitably “autobiographic.” Personal entanglements, however, are not only compatible with but can be beneficial to sound research – that is, if the ethnographer engages in self-reflexivity. Self-reflexivity generates important insights into the bearing of the personal on epistemological and ethical aspects of research, on possible distortions that stem from it, and on the “situatedness” of knowledge production (Leibing and McLean 2007). With reflexivity, the acknowledgement and exploration of personal sentiments in fieldwork can become a valuable source of information about the research we produce, connecting objects of study with the ethical, moral and personal dimensions of our research.

Given the ramifications of “the shadows of fieldwork,” I even wondered whether the decision to go to the front was ethically sound. What kind of data did this episodic encounter could produce? Were these insights more valid than listening to volunteers’ accounts of their trips to the front? After reflection, I concluded that my decision to go to the front had more to do with my

personal entanglements with the war than the goals of my research. My primary interest was identity formation processes in volunteer communities, not the milieu of interaction between civilians and militaries. While interactions are important, as they define the context within which identity formation takes place, I was more interested in the meaning making around these experiences and did not have to subject myself to war realities to study it. In thinking about how to better approach decision-making in the field, I side with Vanderstaay (2005: 403) who argues against the “judgement in the context” position endorsed by some ethnographers and advocates for reviewing “similar studies with an eye for the ethical dilemmas encountered by previous ethnographers” and establishing “conservative guidelines before entering the field.” Making a sound decision in the field is necessarily difficult, especially in conflict settings, as ethnographers have to balance conflicting ethical demands, safety considerations and other issues that emerge unexpectedly. Establishing guidelines, reservations, and resources to rely on before embarking on fieldwork provides some grounding in an otherwise uncertain and challenging environment.

Identification with grief and suffering

The demands of fieldwork, especially in conflict settings, go beyond the complexities of sound decision making and may cause psychological and emotional distress to the researcher. Scholars of civil war (Wood 2006; Bell et al. 2001) note the possibility of “secondary trauma” as a result of working in “injurious” settings. For example, after doing political ethnography on Islamic radicalization in the North Caucasus, Ratelle (2013) reflects on the very intense and stressful movements he encountered in the field. He confides that on occasion, he felt his life was in danger, and he suffered from PTSD upon the completion of fieldwork. He also recounts the discomfort of the “distant voyeur” feeling that comes from distancing oneself from the conflict at the end of ethnographic immersion. Ratelle notes that the attachments he developed in the field

generated a profound sense of helplessness upon his return; he felt the urge to go back to the field to “share once again the daily life of these people” to soothe his personal trauma caused by exposure to difficult experiences (2013: 211).

Conducting research on civilian volunteers whose engagement was spurred by war situated me in an environment where my research participants constantly dealt with the traumatic realities of war. As fieldwork went on, I was increasingly subsumed by human suffering and precarity. In Bondi’s (2003) words, I identified with my research participants, absorbing and incorporating their experiences and exposure to trauma into my own psyche. According to Bondi, emotional identification entails psychic exchanges that simultaneously produce and traverse boundaries between self and other. This suggests the permeability of these boundaries and marks the possibility of confusion between self and other in the context of ethnographic work. As Bondi explains, identification inevitably contains an element of the unconscious, as it is derived from experiences suffused with myriad feelings and emotions beyond our capacity to grasp. This point is important because it suggests that identification influences the development of our personalities and our interactions with others in subtle but powerful ways that lie beyond our recognition. The ability to identify with someone else indicates recognition and understanding of his or her experiences and is thus important for the researcher, but Bondi (2003) draws attention to intense identification as a source of “secondary trauma” experienced by the researcher.

Upon reflection, I realize I identified with volunteers unconsciously by incorporating aspects of their experiences into my own psyche. This was expressed in my often felt but rarely acknowledged guilt for withdrawing from experiences that could be “injurious” and in my frequent comparisons of my emotional weakness and the volunteers’ emotional resilience. One exchange sticks in my memory. I was speaking to a female volunteer who investigated the cases of those

taken hostage or killed during the Ilovaisk battle. She spent some time flipping over the pages of her notebook containing details of each case. In explaining her work to me, she talked extensively about relations she developed with families of Ilovaisk victims, supporting them through the painful process of locating those who had gone missing. Talking about the effect this war engagement had on her life, my respondent focused on positive changes, saying it had made her philosophy of life more positive and constructive. After the fieldwork, I came back to this and similar interviews repeatedly, comparing my own emotional weakness when dealing with traumatic cases to the resilience and courage of my respondents. These often-unacknowledged comparisons stem from our introjection of the attributes of others into ourselves; we internalize someone else's traits and make them formative of our perception of self. In Bondi's words, what was happening between me and my interviewees was an unconscious process of projective identification where I actively incorporated into my inner reality the experiences of my interviewees. We can also project our own emotions onto others to recognize how someone else feels. As Bondi (2003:70) notes, these introjective and projective experiences can make us "feel changed in some way, and we might well feel concerned if we don't."

Attention to emotional reactions to the field are important; stress and emotional injuries are not secondary to our research, but frame it in profound ways. Vanderstaay (2005: 402) states that the emotional distress he experienced during his fieldwork "was not subsidiary to the research itself. That is, it was not something that could be bracketed and postponed until the project was completed, as doctoral candidates are sometimes advised to do." He contends that emotional distress affected his decision making at every stage of his fieldwork and inhibited his capacity to make sound judgements. Making a similar point, Wood says that "inadequate attention to them

[stresses] may lead field researchers to make errors in judgement that may have significant consequences for their research subjects as well as themselves” (2006: 384).

Given the centrality of emotional distress to ethnographic work, how do we deal with the emotional burdens in such a way as to ensure the integrity of our work and ourselves? Bondi (2003:71) suggests moving from identification with research participants to empathy, where the researcher “imaginatively enters into the experiential world of an other.” The difference between identification and empathy is that empathy includes “the processing of, and the rendering available, unconscious communications” (71). As Bondi notes, this processing allows the researcher to remain alert to the difference between self and other and sustains the capacity to recognize someone else’s feelings without being incapacitated by them. By and large, empathy creates an intersubjective space available for the expression of emotions on both sides of an exchange, allowing the researcher to oscillate between participation in the exchange (unconscious identification) and observation (remaining aware of the self/other distinction). Bondi concludes that empathy creates a room to maneuver, “a kind of a psychic space in which affinities and similarities can be recognized, at the same time as retaining a sense of difference and distance” (2003: 73). To this, Henry (2012: 535) adds that empathy is not only a cognitive, affective and communicative process, a space within which recognition of experiences can occur, but also “a matter of performative display and concrete social practice.” She urges ethnographers to pay attention to how they might *do* empathy by engaging with the emotional practices of the people with whom they work.

While the concept of empathy is a useful way to reflect on fieldwork dynamics, moving from identification to empathy can be challenging and is not always successful. I find Erskine’s (1996) point about the permission to give ourselves time to grieve and absorb the emotional burden

of fieldwork an important one. As we all experience grief differently, comparisons are not productive in dealing with our own reactions to loss and precarity. Instead, we should acknowledge our own feelings, return to them in a sympathetic way, and accept them as part of life. Carroll (2016) talks about “the work of forgiving” the researcher has to do when conducting fieldwork in a traumatic environment. This forgiving can take different forms. It can include forgiving oneself for incapacitation and paralysis felt in the field when one does not cope well with the experiences of grief. It can also mean forgiving oneself for having adjustment problems in the field, for withdrawing from “injurious” enterprises or “leaving the field” while others continue dealing with grief and precarity. The work of forgiving is an important step towards acquiring an ability to reflect and intellectually engage with “the field.” It can be achieved by acquiring distance from intense moments that “trap” us, so that we are given “a second catching” (Favret-Saada 1980 quoted in Carroll 2016) “from which meaningful narrative can emerge, in which everything unsettled must be settled again” (Carroll 2016). For me, it meant coming to terms with the distress experienced during interviews and also accepting a new reality of war in Ukraine. It took me a few months after the fieldwork to recover from the emotional distress of fieldwork and to work through the interviews.

Carefully attending to emotions provoked by the field is important for the production of ethnographic knowledge. Since “the emotion turn” in ethnography, scholars have noted a link between ethnographic knowledge and deep emotional responses in the context of fieldwork, speaking of the “revelatory potential” of emotions, such as grief and empathy. Henry (2012: 528) says emotions have the potential to “lead to rich ethnographic understanding, particularly when such moments productively draw us into participatory cultural performances that help mediate the conceptual divide between meaning and feeling, observer and observed.” Csordas (2007: 106)

describes “the transmutation of sensibilities” when the researcher’s experiences reflect that of “an indigenous person in the sense of its form and its relevance to the immediate setting, but not in terms of its psycho-dynamic content.” Identifying with and reflecting on the emotional demands of war volunteering led me to think about the affective side of war engagement and “the emotional work” of female volunteers who channelled their emotions to mediate the grief and suffering generated by war. Relegating my own emotion and putting it “off to the side” during fieldwork helped me capture the regulation of emotions by female volunteers and their reasoning in doing so. My recognition that emotions are a relational and connective medium (Bondi 2005) drew my attention to affective gender solidarities created by war engagement.

By and large, my reflections on my emotional reactions were revelatory; they enhanced my ability to understand the role of emotions in generating and sustaining long-term engagement. Nevertheless, while emotional entanglements and attention to emotions during the writing phase enriched my research, I wish I had been more cognisant of the emotional demands of “the field,” of the need to master the skills of empathic engagement, and of the altering power of emotional entanglements on identity.

Emotional entanglements aside, doing ethnography can be a very unsettling experience, one that changes the researcher in profound and complex ways. The transformative potential of ethnographic work is intrinsic to its nature; it requires one to be “perpetually pulled beyond the limits of one’s own taken-for-granted world” (Narayan 2014). Ethnographers are expected to situate themselves in other people’s systems of signification, suspend their habitual ways of thinking, and be skeptical of own instincts/preconceptions. Those studying their own societies are required to learn to “see otherwise” things that were previously known (Decoteau 2017) and to keep a distance to strengthen their critical perception and analysis (Greene 2014). Thus,

ethnographic work has cognitive, cultural and even existential challenges, the tackling of which shifts our perception of our own culture and (in)forms our sensibilities. Stressing this point, Darling (2014) says fieldwork is not just a process of data collection. It alters the researcher by shaping his or her sensibilities and dispositions in profound ways. Drawing on Okeley, Leibing and McLean make a similar point; “the experience of fieldwork is “totalizing,” drawing upon the “whole being,” and not reducible to the mere “collection of data by a dehumanized machine” (Okeley 1992: 3 quoted in Leibing and McLean 2007).

In any ethnographic pursuit, “commitment to uncertainty, humility and *unlearning* in the research process” (Darling 2014: 203, emphasis in original) is necessary to move through the unpredictability, messiness, and complexity of the life worlds we study and the encounters within which we immerse ourselves. Bondi (2003) writes that ethnographic encounters contain profound uncertainty; the researcher and the researched “enter into each new encounter not knowing what will happen, including whether it will be possible to foster a relationship that is experienced as non-exploitative, or what scope (if any) there will be for identification and/or empathic understanding” (Bondi 2003: 66). Ethnographers emphasize the importance of “creative intelligence” (Ball 1990) necessary for fostering relations in the field and portraying social phenomena in their complexity, both theoretically and ethically.

Ball (1990: 165) suggests ethnographic work relies on the social skills of the researcher to access the field and establish rapport with research participants. He states that “the researcher’s task is to make themselves [sic] acceptable to all parties in the field, if possible, to take on a research role that allows maximum flexibility in forms of social relations and social interaction.” Others point out that ethnographic work requires more than social skills; researchers must deploy their own personality and body as research instruments to interact with the environments they

attempt to comprehend (Crane-Seeber 2012). The use of our own bodies, emotions and personalities can affect our self-image and bodily composure in unforeseen ways. For example, Crane-Seeber (2012) contends that the prevalent cultural narratives on militarised masculinity on an American military base influenced his perception of their own masculinity. Circulating discourses made him feel weak, emasculated, and doubtful of his own body, affecting his self-esteem and forcing him to change his daily routine, among other things. Similarly, Cupples (2002) notes how her sexual and gendered subjectivities shifted in the field as she had to renegotiate her femininity and perform it more self-consciously. Reflecting on these and similar effects, scholars examine the impact of the field on the identity of the researcher, showing how the researcher can get “caught” by the cultural and social circumstances that surround ethnographic work.

I noted above that my academic engagement and ethnographic work obliged me to examine my sense of national identity, opening up space to reconfigure the ways I understand it. While the people I worked with felt an increased sense of identification with Ukraine, its culture and history, I had to move in a different direction. To understand the upsurge in their national and civic belonging and nationalising tendencies spurred by war, I had to familiarize myself with different sets of literature which ultimately shaped my views on nation, nationalism, and national belonging. As a result, I increasingly dissociated myself from rigid understandings of national identity, learning instead to look at it through the lens of political and social forces acting on individuals in particular ways to produce national identities. As Benzecry (2015) notes, ethnographers go into the field armed with “a theoretical helmet” - a set of theoretical concepts which allows us to interrogate the world. These theoretical concepts, however, are not just our tools. They are often our new way of making sense of the world. These new modes of thinking constitute our “self” and shape our ways of being and acting in spaces outside “the field.” Through

intellectual aspirations of which fieldwork is an important part, we “become someone else that [we] were not in the beginning of it” (Foucault 1988), forging new modes of being and acting. This “becoming” influences our subjectivities and shifts our positioning vis-à-vis others.

Fieldwork also compelled me to reflect on modes of relatedness to volunteers, the army and war more generally. Weiss (2007) says ethnographers who write about their own society commonly become personally involved in their work and find it difficult to critically engage with the subject. In the face of situations that threaten “national security,” the researcher might struggle to reconcile being a good citizen and a critical scholar. This observation resonated with me because the outbreak of war presented a security threat to Ukraine and civilian volunteers and combatants were generally credited for preserving Ukraine. The social praise of volunteer work and the mainstream understanding of it as a mark of patriotism and altruism made it difficult to develop a critical perspective of volunteers’ engagement. Circulating discourses about the precarity of soldiers and IDPs added to the difficulty of questioning certain modes of acting and their implications. As feminist scholars note (Enloe 2015), a lack of questioning on war and the military is exactly what contributed to the militarisation of society. To resist it, one has to become “a skeptically curious military analyst” and pursue complex dynamics and reliable explanations about the military, the army and war (Enloe 2015: 7).

For me, critical engagement with the data became possible only after the fieldwork, once I acquired a certain distance. Reflecting on my previous ways of thinking, I asked whether and to what extent the concept of militarisation could be applied to me. Should any support of those serving on the frontline be considered through the lens of militarisation or was it possible to relate to soldiers’ precarity at a human level, disassociating militarisation from assistance? Smith et al. (2011: 240) say that our personal relationships with the object of study raise questions that

“are deeply personal and simultaneously ‘scholarly’”. Coming back to them is an ongoing task; it shapes both scholarly writing and the researchers themselves, including how they are positioned vis-à-vis others.

Conclusion

Ethnographic work requires training, professional audacity and personal openness to self-scrutiny and reflexivity. As we embark on an ethnographic journey, fieldwork has the potential to change us in unforeseen and complex ways, reconfiguring our relations to others and our perception of self. Reflections about our positionality and its shifting contours help us overcome a static understanding of self; through reflexivity, we note how our subjectivities shift in response to our intellectual wonderings and intersubjective exchanges. Upon reflection, I know that my personal experience of fieldwork was transformative. It influenced my understanding of national identity, community engagement and modes of citizenship engagement. It reshaped my sensibilities and determinations of scholarly engagement, a process that is always in flux and never finished. As my subjectivities in the field shifted, so too did my positionality vis-à-vis my research participants. As I have shown in this chapter, my insider status, regional and educational background, and professional affiliation influenced my access to the field; but at the same time, shifts in my subjectivities repositioned me in relation to my research subjects.

Ethnographic work in conflict settings has emotional challenges for us as researchers. It requires us to use our minds, bodies and emotions to decipher the complexity of the social realities of war and conflict. As we immerse ourselves in the lived precarity of others, we draw on our inner worlds to understand and recognize feelings and experiences external to us. If approached with caution, this kind of immersion can produce more grounded accounts of the lives and stories of our research participants. The researcher, however, should be equipped with techniques of self-

care to reduce or regulate the distress that accompanies immersion in stressful settings. One suggestion is to acquire (build/develop) an ability to move from identification with grief to empathy, thus creating a space to distinguish between our own experiences and those of others. The researcher should also be prepared to do the work of self-forgiving and accept failures, numbness and emotional incapacitation. This is a daunting task, impossible to achieve without acquiring some distance from immersion and reflecting on its dynamics.

Chapter 3. Civilian volunteer engagement under Ukraine's limited statehood

“The army was pretty much non-existent in Ukraine”.

“Authorities dissipated in Odesa and so did the police force”.

“The army is taken care by people, IDPs are taken care by people, injured and prisoners of war are taken care by people – people take care of everything in Ukraine”. (Fieldwork Notes, Summer 2015)

Many Ukrainian volunteers I interviewed over the course of my research described the destitution of soldiers and volunteer battalion fighters at the outset of war on Donbas. They also talked about the precarious situation of those injured on the battlefield and those displaced by the war. Their accounts contained details about the state's indifference or inability to provide assistance to its most vulnerable and needy citizens. Many were frustrated with a dysfunctional and corrupt bureaucracy that was not responsive to war realities. The state was experienced as lacking capacity to engage militarily, cope with the disastrous consequences of war and care for individuals affected by it.

The accounts of state failure in addressing the demands of war point to the need to differentiate between normative obligations of the state to govern, implement decisions and provide welfare on the one hand and its limited capacity to fulfill these tasks on the other. Drawing on the literature on limited statehood, this chapter reviews the areas of limited statehood in Ukraine before and during the Donbas war. It pays particular attention to the state's inept handling of combatants and civilians at the outset of war and examines how limited statehood in Ukraine was experienced by these categories of people. Situating civilian mobilization at the rear contextually, the chapter develops a typology of the tasks undertaken by civilian volunteers to address the state's limited capacity and traces the evolution of volunteer work over the first year of engagement.

I show that when the need for emergency assistance subsided, volunteers increasingly

worked to ensure the *substantive citizenship* of those impacted by war. This meant the enactment of the legal rights of combatants and war-affected civilians *in practice* with improved accessibility to welfare services for them. In so doing, volunteers ordered welfare provision *from below* and expanded the state capacity to care for its destitute citizens. Stressing the affective nature of this type of engagement, the chapter posits it as a collectivizing enterprise that de-individualizes the costs of war, including the material, administrative and social burdens befallen war-affected populations. Through their emotional investment and practical actions, volunteers expanded the space of *belonging* for combatants and internally displaced persons in a way that positions them as valued members of a larger community.

Ukraine's limited statehood: since independence to the Donbas war

Ukraine since 1991 can be theorized as a country with limited statehood. After the fall of the Soviet Union, there was an enthusiastic expectation that Ukraine would democratize and move away from the legacies of its totalitarian past. However, its political path has been turbulent and controversial. Ukraine struggled to progress politically, often backtracking to authoritarian practices of power consolidation and using undemocratic strategies to govern. The governments of Ukraine have been the subject of pointed critiques for the emergence of oligarchic rule (Puglisi 2003; Åslund 2005), the ballooning of super-presidentialism under the presidency of Yanukovich (Popova 2010) and the use of informal and often illegal practices instead of the rule of law to govern (Darden 2001; Popova 2010). There is a general consensus among scholars that these developments have constrained both the political authority and the institutional capacity of Ukraine.

Arguably one of the major constraints faced by Ukraine since independence stems from the rise of an oligarchy in the 1990s. Soviet rule blended political and economic domains, giving

state elites access to economic resources (Hellman 1998). This allowed Ukraine's state elites to usurp resources and power during the privatisation phase and stall the completion of market reforms. Partial reforms allowed the concentration of gains in the hands of a few, leaving most of the population in a precarious position. Instead of a market economy, an oligarchy was created – a group of elites with enormous political and economic power (Round et al. 2008). This resulted in a peculiar governance style, which Wanner terms “entrepreneurial governmentality” (2005). Government officials engaged in entrepreneurial activities to consolidate their property and power. Legal manipulations, stealing from the state and creating conditions for establishing a monopoly over Ukraine's nascent market by taking “gifts” and “bribes” from business persons was prevalent. These informal practices gave way to *nomenklatura* capitalism, where government officials functioned as entrepreneurs and used state resources for personal gains (Wanner 2005). Hellman and Kaufmann (2003) contend that this resulted in “state capture” where private firms could shape the institutional environment in which the state operated. Darden (2001) adds that governance in Ukraine has frequently been enacted through informal and illegal practices, not the rule of law. Ukraine's state elites developed an informal compensation system based on graft and surveillance, eliciting obedience and conformity outside formal institutions. Scherbak (2015) points out that contradictory transformations since Ukraine's independence have backtracked into decline after the 2010 election of Victor Yanukovich (Scherbak 2015 cited in Minakov 2015a). These studies show the extent to which Ukraine's political authority and institutions have been constrained since independence.

Ukraine's statehood has been limited on other fronts too. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Ukraine experienced a profound economic decline. According to expert estimates, macroeconomic and firm-level structural changes during the transition period “resulted in a

dramatic decline in economic activity, rivaling that of the Great Depression in the 1930s” (Brück et al. 2010: 124). From the start of transition in 1989 until the resumption of economic growth, countries in Eastern and Central Europe lost from one fifth to more than two-thirds of their pre-transition GDP. Ukraine experienced economic decline for 10 consecutive years between 1990 and 1999, with its real GDP contracting by over 60% (ibid.). The economic decline severely impacted the life of ordinary Ukrainians and led to the impoverishment of many. The dissolution of social institutions, such as work collectives and professional unions amidst the embrace of market economy damaged previous forms of professional and social support and undermined people’s professional and social identity (Shevchenko 2002).

This social, economic and professional dislocation was accompanied by the state’s retreat from many spheres of life. The state found itself struggling to fulfill its core functions, regulate relations with citizens or properly distribute welfare services (Wanner 2005; Polese 2008; Phillips 2010; Morris and Polese 2013; 2016; Danyliv et al. 2012). The public sector suffered immensely from deficiencies and transformation-induced shortages, economic decline and changing ideologies of the roles of the state and the individual (Polese 2014; Wanner 2005; Bazylevych 2009). Wages of street level bureaucrats plunged to the extent that most were unable to live on the revenue provided by the state, turning street level bureaucrats into “working poor” (Polese 2008). Public institutions often lacked administrative, financial, technical and professional resources to conduct their work and deliver public services in a consistent, responsible and equitable manner.

With the state’s limited ability to care and provide for its citizens, public services became *de facto* privatized, with street level bureaucrats relying on informal arrangements to

address the failures of the state (Polese 2014).¹⁷ One example is the healthcare system. While healthcare in Ukraine is officially state-funded, the informal collection of payments and transactions outside state control are commonplace. Doctors, for example, expect extra payments from patients for medical treatments; medical personnel seek to be “thanked” with “gifts” or extra money for services; certain dubiously legal practices, such as issuing a sick note on special request, are provided for under-the-table payments. In 2012, about 70% of surveyed patients in Ukraine reported paying at some point for medical services that are officially free (Danyliv et al. 2012). Street level bureaucrats across public sectors engage in informal practices to improve their livelihood. Polese (2008) contends that the rise of informality in post-Soviet Ukraine should be understood as a fundamental aspect of survival in an environment where the state fails to fulfill its core functions. As I demonstrate later, the rise of informality in public service provision and a lack of resources profoundly shaped volunteer preoccupations amidst the war on Donbas.

Dramatic shortages in funding also put a strain on Ukraine’s military capacity. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine inherited a large share of Soviet’s military capacity with over 750,000 soldiers stationed on the territory of Ukraine in 1991 (Jaworsky 1996). Ukraine’s politicians faced an immense task of transforming existing capabilities and resources into an independent army. Scholars document significant challenges that complicated the process of restructuring and downsizing the army (Jaworsky 1996). First and foremost, the financial costs associated with reforms and reduction of the Soviet military were immense and the military received only one fifth of the requested funds. This complicated Ukraine’s ability to carry out

¹⁷ Street-level bureaucrats is a category of public servants who have immediate contact with citizens, namely doctors, health personnel, police officers, or social workers (Lipsky 1980). Their main duty lies in interpreting the ambitions of legislation and policies, subsequently channeling services to citizens (Hjörne et al. 2010). This position is exceptional in that it gives access to both lived experiences of individuals and institutional decision making simultaneously.

planned reforms. Second, the funds available at the military were used inefficiently due to corruption and a lack of experience with budgetary matters. This considerably hampered budget planning in the long term and reduced the army's functionality. After the Orange Revolution, as the Ukrainian government actively sought Euro-Atlantic integration, a commitment to military reforms was renewed (Sanders 2008). This included the embrace of the US emulated paradigm army which was supposed to imitate the US military and create "agile, mobile, high tech, flexible, deployable and interoperable professional forces" in Ukraine (2008: 601). Yet, as Sanders notes, these efforts were likewise inhibited by a lack of funding and the unstable political environment.

Dramatic shortages in funding of the Ukrainian Army have had a profoundly negative effect on its personnel. As Jaworsky (1996) notes, conditions of service for officers and troops have deteriorated significantly since Ukraine's independence. Little funds were allocated to training and professional exercises, with the combat readiness of the army dropping critically. Salaries of military personnel were low, with officers "earning as much as a bus driver" (Grytsenko 1998), and delays in wage payments made it difficult for military personnel to survive. Most conscripts and officers ended up living in poor, sometimes atrocious, conditions. Military service became an unattractive option, with draft evasion increasingly common (Jaworsky 1996).¹⁸ As in other state institutions, many officers have been forced to engage in activities outside the military to supplement their income. The destitution of low-ranking military personnel went hand in hand with corrupt practices in the higher military echelons, causing rifts within the military ranks (Parchomenko 2002). Combined, these factors have profoundly undermined the prestige of the army, resulting in high levels of demoralization (Jaworsky 1996), high suicide rates (Rozaanov et

¹⁸ Gross (1990) notes that the popularity of the military profession declined in the glasnost' period across social strata and the Soviet army experienced shortages of officers, as well as a continuing deterioration in their quality because of social problems in the army (bullying, drug usage, poor service conditions).

al. 2002) and a general atmosphere of decline.¹⁹ While some improvements and reforms were made, the overall state of Ukrainian military forces remained poor and operational effectiveness was low (Sanders 2008). In 2014, the Ukrainian Army was impoverished, ill-equipped and reduced in size to 157,456 military personnel, including 119,166 soldiers (Chysel'nist' Zbroinyh 2015).

Recent political and military upheavals, described in greater detail in the introduction, presented additional challenges to Ukraine's statehood. Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014, followed by the violence on Donbas, incapacitated the Ukrainian state regionally. According to Oleksandr Turchynov, Acting President of Ukraine in spring 2014, only 3,900 Ukrainian army troops remained loyal to the Ukrainian state out of 13,000 stationed in Crimea when the annexation took place (Turchynov Rozpoviv 2017). The situation with the internal security forces (SBU) was even more catastrophic - 99% of the personnel switched loyalties to Russia, incapacitating Ukrainian state institutions in Crimea. The economic decline put an additional strain on Ukraine's capacity to engage militarily.²⁰

Critically lacking resources, the Ukrainian government announced the beginning of an "anti-terrorist" operation (ATO) on 13 April 2014 to contest the separatist forces on Donbas (Kudelia 2016). Militarily, only two tactical battalions (about 5,000 troops) were combat ready to engage in warfare when the Donbas hostilities escalated (Puglisi 2015). To assist in military operations, over 30 voluntary battalions were formed. These formations were diverse in scope and size, with numbers ranging from several dozens to several hundred people per unit (ibid). Initially self-supported and self-equipped, most of them were integrated into the Interior and Defense

¹⁹ After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine had one of highest suicide rates in the world. The average level in 1998 was 29.6 per 100,000 population. The suicide rate in the army followed the societal trend (Rožanov, Mokhovikov, & Stiliha 2002).

²⁰ The war aggravated the overall economic deterioration in the country with Ukraine losing 20 percent of its GDP due to Russia's annexation of Crimea and the uprising on Donbas within the first year of war (Croft 2014c). Real income dropped by one quarter while the prices for basic commodities increased by 40 percent (OUNHC 2015).

Ministries within the first year of war. The National Guard was also reestablished and a mandatory military draft was resumed to increase Ukraine's military capacity in November 2014 (Smith-Park and Eshchenko 2014).

Military and civilian mobilization unfolded against the backdrop of Ukraine's constraints to sustain its military operations and address the humanitarian consequences of war. What did it mean in a practical sense? How was Ukraine's limited statehood experienced by combatants and internally displaced individuals in the initial phases of war? What challenges did they face in conducting military service or accessing social, economic and other services? To answer these and related questions, I document the state of the Ukrainian military focus from April 2014 to August 2015 and discuss the situation of IDPs during the same time period. As developments in Ukraine are not static, temporal precision is necessary for understanding the dynamics of civilian mobilization at the rear. I rely on ethnographic data collected during my fieldwork as well as a review of secondary sources (UN reports, data on the IDPs needs assessment, and other available documents).

“The army with no bullets”: Ukraine's military capacity at the outset of Donbas war

As many soldiers and voluntary fighters were called to join the ranks of the military and defend the state in peril, many of my respondents commented on the poor military preparedness of new conscripts in the months following the beginning of war. After numerous visits to military training fields, one of them, a former soldier, observed:

Initially, the army was comprised of hairdressers, musicians, gardeners, painters, construction workers, and so on. Many of them had no clue about the army and how to approach a gun. Many of the conscripted had no basic military knowledge and training. We were far away from having a professional army in 2014. It was an army of complete amateurs! (Odesa, Fieldwork, 25 July 2015)

Along with poor military readiness, the Ukrainian army lacked basic equipment. According to the Ministry of Defense, only four percent of the Ukrainian military had life-saving items, like helmets and bulletproof jackets in April 2014 (Puglisi 2015). At the beginning of combat, the majority of soldiers and volunteers were deployed without uniforms or basic ammunition. My respondents reported that soldiers had to share life vests in situations of intensified shelling and often found themselves in drastic need of basic supplies (Field Notes 2015). Food provision was poor and insufficient. Many regiments had little access to potable water with soldiers reportedly having to drink “water from the puddles” or of very poor quality “with rust” (Field Notes 2015). These and other nutrition deficiencies harmed the health of combatants and created arduous conditions for military service. When I was documenting the tasks undertaken by volunteers, I frequently heard stories like the following:

Everything was lacking! Even very basic thing, not talking about something more sophisticated. The army didn't even have bullets! I remember one soldier got 5 bullets as his birthday gift from his commander. Do you understand what 5 bullets is? During one training, 6 soldiers use a thousand bullets. What is 5 bullets? It's nothing. It's enough to commit suicide, I guess. So, we started thinking of ways to help, identify most urgent needs. (Kharkiv, Fieldwork, 14 June 2015)

“Boys” (soldiers and volunteer fighters) were sleeping on the ground in early spring, in their clothes. They didn't even have sleeping bags, not to mention tents. That tells you something about the conditions our army found itself at the outbreak of war. Soldiers became hostage of the extremely ineffective bureaucracy and had to obey its orders. And they were ordered to go, fight, and sleep in the snow with nothing provided. Military personnel were in stark need of support at that time, much more than any other category of people. (Kharkiv, Fieldwork, 22 June 2015)

At first, we were delivering everything possible to the front. Water, clothing and shoes, because our soldiers were poorly dressed. I used to purchase food by myself – pasta, oil, butter, grains, flour, potatoes and so on. Then I would load up my small car to the brim, go to the front, cook and come back home. Soldiers were hungry there and everything was missing. It was a challenge to find something to cook in. I'd go to the closest store and find a bucket. Then we'd

set up a fire for cooking, collect woods, and assemble bricks. Guys were so hungry that they would eat pasta without oil. (Odesa, 12 Fieldwork July 2015)

In short, the situation in the army was dire. Most expenses incurred on the front were covered by relatives, friends and acquaintances of those in the military. Special troops, such as intelligence services, snipers and narrow specialists faced additional challenges as they needed expensive technology, equipment and gear to engage in military operations. Volunteer fighters, comprising one in eight servicemen at the outset of war, were in the most precarious position (Zinets 2016). This is because they did not receive even minimal assistance from the state. In spring-summer of 2014, most of them had to rely on familial or private networks or personal resources for such necessities as helmets or vests.²¹ Those lacking financial means or connections arrived at the front dressed as civilians, wearing flip-flops and sports shoes instead of combat uniforms (Field Notes 2015).

Even when the Ministry of Defense provided certain items, the quality and quantity was often unacceptable. Soldiers complained that they were given uniforms from flammable fabric that easily caught fire and two pairs of socks for the whole period of service (Zinets 2016). Numerous issues were reported by my respondents, but two examples should suffice to illustrate the deficiency of provision regulations. A soldier, for instance, is entitled to 1.5 liters of potable water per day. This included water consumption, personal hygiene, laundry, and other types of usage.²² But as many remarked, this was not sufficient and additional chains of supply had to be established to meet the actual needs of the combatants, not nominal ones. Another provision stipulated that a

²¹ Some volunteer battalions received support from Ukrainian oligarchs. For example, Dnipro 1 - Special Tasks Patrol Police Regiment was formed voluntarily in April 2014 with the alleged financial support of Ukrainian oligarch Ihor Kolomoyskyi. Reportedly, Ukrainian oligarchs financially invested in aiding voluntary battalions.

²² This provision was amended in October of 2016 with an increase to 3 liters of potable water per day during the summer times for ATO combatants in the field or undergoing military training or relocation. The provision for the rest of the year remained at 1.5 litres per soldier (UNN 2016).

soldier was entitled to only one uniform per year. One of my respondents expressed his bewilderment:

What is the soldier supposed to do if the uniform gets destroyed in two weeks instead of lasting for a year? If a soldier in a combat-ready situation has to climb up the tank, he lifts his leg and his pants dissolve. You can't be a good soldier if you have no pants. There are so many things like that in our army – we can talk forever about it. (Odesa, Fieldwork, 22 July 2015)

Provision regulations, as these accounts demonstrate, frequently did not reflect the true needs of the army. The inaptness of existing regulations touched on various aspects of military life and demanded additional provision chains to be established and maintained.

Bureaucratic inadequacies were cited as another restraint on the functioning of the army. A shortage of parts, for one, meant military machinists were unable to repair tanks. Yet requesting new parts presupposed a lot of red tape and time, creating barriers for sound military operations. One of my respondents told me about his recent trip to the front to illustrate the bureaucratic conundrums and explain why military regiments could not always rely on the state in providing combat necessary items:

During my last trip, I brought four tank batteries to a military regiment. You know, one tank needs four batteries to function. They cost 25,500 hryvnias each (app. 1,150 USD at the time of fieldwork). There are two tanks at that military location, one of them not working. It doesn't start. You can't use just one tank, because any military expedition is conducted in pairs, with two tanks. That's a military tactic. One tank can't be sent for a task. Fighting in that location can restart any time and soldiers are left with no armoured fighting vehicles. (Odesa, Fieldwork, 22 July 2015)

As my respondent further explained, batteries were available at the military warehouse, but getting them would be a bureaucratic nightmare. Per provisions, batteries are supposed to last for five years, but after a year and half, they stop working. "One has to conduct an investigation and identify the reason of malfunctioning", he complained. This meant that a special committee had to be created to find those responsible for the damage and oblige them to pay a fine. As my

respondent concluded, no report gets filed because the person found liable would have to reimburse a hefty sum of money to the regiment. The downside is that the regiment is left with no functional tanks and state institutions were not responsive enough to amend the bureaucratic procedures to address the immediate and urgent needs of war. According to my respondents, instances of this sort were pervasive on the front and further reduced an already faltering military capacity.

In other instances, the chain and standards of provision were designed properly but assumed the absence of sabotage, incompetence and treachery in the bureaucratic and command chain. These assumptions deviated from the realities in Ukraine. A lack of institutional competence meant the heads of the procurement departments and commanders of military units were not always even aware of regulations or did not know how to submit a request to get necessary supplies. Corruption in state military institutions derailed and reduced the cost-effectiveness of army procurements. Insider deals often replaced public tenders and kick-backs were used to secure contracts. Instances of sabotage and treachery in the military with some officers at the regional and national levels displaying scant loyalty to the Ukrainian state were reported as causing serious problems and endangering combatants' lives (Field Notes 2015). Altogether, these issues trimmed down the availability and quality of army supplies, reducing the capacity of the Ukrainian army to engage in military combat.

Issues were numerous outside of the front too, particularly with medical treatment. One of my respondents, a doctor from Dnipropetrovs'k, observed that not a single area in the hospital of his volunteer engagement met basic sanitary requirements:

A leaking roof, a broken elevator with the injured being transported from one floor to another on stretchers. Almost no medication – just the basic supplies of bandage and antibiotics. Nowadays, doctors cannot imagine their work without extensive medical materials and equipment, but everything was lacking. The situation was catastrophic. (Dnipropetrovs'k, Fieldwork, 8 August 2015)

With many basic items missing or not functioning properly, my respondents felt that local bureaucracies and institutions of public service provision were inapt to care for those on the frontlines. The state in Ukraine was experienced by my respondents as profoundly lacking resources, institutional capacity and competence to deal with war realities in the war zone and outside. Ill-equipped facilities, lack of medical supplies and strained financial resources constrained the ability of bureaucrats to care for those injured on the front. Soldiers and volunteer fighters were seen as left on their own to face a stark reality of having to fight a war with close to nothing provided.

“Nobody was concerned with IDPs”: Limited state care for internally displaced persons

The situation was similarly arduous for the internally displaced. As stated, the number of internally displaced individuals exceeded 1.4 million in August 2015 (IDMC 2015). Most congregated in the areas bordering the war zone. The eastern regions of Ukraine accommodated three quarters of the IDP population, with Kharkiv region accepting 186,674 and Dnipropetrovs’k - 72,391 (Ministry of Social Policy 28 August 2015 quoted in IDMC 2015). Odesa sheltered a smaller number of IDPs (30,800), but hosted most disabled persons and orphans who required additional care and funds (UNHCR 2015). The flow of internally displaced individuals was particularly high in the first months of war because of intense shelling in that period, climbing up in August 2014 because of intensified fighting.

According to the “Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement” developed by the United Nations, the national government and local authorities are responsible for taking care and protecting IDPs (UNHCR 2005). Yet, many commentators noted that the Ukrainian government did not handle the issue of displacement effectively. During the initial phase of war, there was no comprehensive and systemic state response to mass displacement. The question of state support of

IDPs was regulated by various ministries and caused considerable confusion.²³ The Law on Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Internally Displaced Persons (the IDP Law) was adopted on 20 October 2014 to simplify access to different social and economic services, yet several of its critical provisions were not implemented two years into the war (UNHCR 2016). The absence of the unified database for IDPs with information on their situation, employment and resettlement was another shortcoming (IDP Report 2018). This meant that the needs of the most vulnerable categories (over one million of those displaced in Ukraine) were poorly identified during the first phases of displacement.²⁴ Local bureaucrats were not properly informed, trained and prepared to take care of those fleeing violence.

Legislative confusion and time-consuming bureaucracy at the local level translated into daily life challenges for those seeking safe refuge and caused complications, disillusionment and a sense of despair. Describing ordinary experiences of IDPs in Kharkiv, my respondent noted:

People would waste their time in long line-ups, grappling with bureaucracy and the indifference of state officials to receive a meaningless piece of paper, which didn't solve anything. They felt lost and tired. They were in a foreign city. They couldn't find their way around endless state departments. They would wander from one office to another, knocking on many doors only to be transferred to yet another official. People felt desperate with nowhere to go for the night. (Kharkiv, Fieldwork, 8 June 2015)

Whereas those escaping violence needed to take care of immediate needs like food, shelter and clothing, individuals who continued to be displaced for some time required long-term solutions. This included housing, employment and social protection (UNHCR 2015). The state

²³ The decision to establish the Ministry of the Temporary Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons, a specialised body for IDPs, was taken only in April 2016 – two years after the war broke out (IDP Report 2018).

²⁴ According to the estimates provided by the Ministry of Social Policy in December 2017, pensioners constitute 52 percent of the total IDP population in Ukraine (771,000 individuals). The number of those with disability amounts to 49,800 people and the number of children is 227,400 (IDP Report 2018). These numbers indicate that over one million of IDPs do not belong to the active labour force and rely on social payments for sustenance.

faced challenges in addressing each area. The Ministry's state target program for IDP housing provision was adopted two and a half years into the war (IDP Report 2018). IDPs staying in collective centers often lived in poor conditions with no running water and lacking heating and cooking facilities (UNHCR 2015). My respondents reported that a sanatorium in Serhiivka village, Odesa region, which hosted 198 IDPs with disabilities, received no state financial support. Volunteers provided food and essential supplies to the residents, but the overall living conditions remained dire. Similarly, issues were numerous with employment and social protection with about 45 percent of IDP households having only enough funds for food and only 35 percent of them being employed in March 2016 (National Monitoring 2017).

IDPs experienced particular problems accessing medical services. During the first year of war, Ukrainian and international volunteers, private donors and charity foundations provided most of the rehabilitation services and necessary equipment (OUNHC 2015). The need for non-state assistance was especially noticeable in the territories bordering the war zone. While these cities faced increased inflows of injured soldiers and displaced persons, the city budgets were not adjusted accordingly. My respondents reported that medical workers simply could not deliver on the promises of the state to provide medical care free of charge. Commenting on the situation in Kharkiv, one of them expressed her perplexity over it:

The city has been overloaded with 300,000 non-residents seeking medical services. The state doesn't help and doesn't compensate the oblast for extra expenses. The flow is very high – the highest across Ukraine. How to deal with this situation? Medics have a point saying that the hospitals are not equipped to address the increased demand for medical services. The money the city receives goes to the needs of the army and those internally displaced remain neglected. (Kharkiv, Fieldwork, 8 June 2015)

As this statement indicates, in situations when the state cannot link up citizens and services in a satisfactory manner, public servants can resort to what Zürcher (2007) calls *selective*

statehood, when certain groups of citizens are prioritized in service provision over others. As Morris and Polese (2016: 5) note, selective statehood generated by state failure to provide basic services leads to a situation whereby bureaucrats and citizens are faced daily with decisions how to allocate available resources. Should the needs of this patient be prioritized or does someone else need the assistance more? Each decision becomes an assessment of the social order, with judgements based on the personhood and social worthiness of those in need of assistance. The statements of my respondents may suggest that in Ukraine, a selective ordering of citizens meant the needs of the military were prioritized over those of internally displaced. A more comprehensive study is necessary to evaluate to what extent this was and remains to be common.

To conclude, the accounts of my respondents illustrate that at the outset of the war the state was perceived as critically lacking the ability to reach out and take care of the individuals most affected by war. My respondents reported knowing firsthand that the army lacked basic supplies and the internally displaced had no recourse for their precarity. They believed that local bureaucracies were incapable of providing sufficient assistance because of financial deficit, inefficiency and incompetence. Corruption and sabotage were cited as pervasive in everyday interactions with state institutions. State support in the regions bordering the war zone was often viewed as non-existent with “IDPs having nowhere to go” and combatants left with little to no state support to fight on the front.

The scope of problems alarmed my respondents and propelled them to action. As Asmolov (2014: 106) points out, “governance has a constructed nature. It consists not only of particular actions, but also of the perception of these actions.” Before deciding on an appropriate course of action, individuals need to determine the nature and scope of the problem. As the magnitude and urgency of needs was identified as alarming and state’s ability to address them as

critically low, ordinary citizens mobilized with a varying degree of commitment to cope with the pressing needs of the war. Summarizing the sentiment expressed by many, one of my respondents remarked:

People have completely undertaken the functions of the state, running ahead of it. People's army, people's IDPs, people's injured, people's prisoners of war – people take care of everything in Ukraine. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs'k, 8 August 2015)

Civilian engagement at the rear: typology of volunteer networks

In response to state's lacking capacity, three types of volunteer networks emerged to address the needs of combatants and displaced persons. This section takes a closer look at each of them, mapping out the nature of provided assistance and modes of engagement. The examples mean to deepen our understanding of mobilization at the rear and outline main areas of civilian interventions under limited statehood.

IDP volunteering

“Station Kharkiv” is the most developed volunteer network in Kharkiv, East Ukraine. It was officially brought in existence on 1 June 2014 to aid those fleeing violence from Donbas. One of the first steps was the creation of an assistance booth at the train station where displaced persons could receive immediate help, clothing and food. Volunteers arranged short-term shelters for the most vulnerable, namely single mothers and the disabled. A city-wide collection of funds and clothing was announced. My respondents recalled that things moved quickly; one person offered an office for consultations, while others used their IT skills to create a database where people could post offers of residence or apply for shelter. New initiatives were generated on the go, as needs were identified.

Since June 2014, “Station Kharkiv” has expanded the kinds of services they provide to IDPs. While they still maintained an informational booth at the train station in the summer of 2015,

their main focus shifted to providing legal advice and employment training. “Station Law” was set up to provide legal consultation and improve IDPs’ legal literacy. “Station Success” emerged to help IDPs adjust their professional qualifications to the demands of the labour market in Kharkiv. This was seen as particularly important, because many displaced residents previously worked in heavy industry and their skillsets were not well suited for other occupations. A year after its sporadic emergence, the network directed its efforts at making displaced persons professionally and socially capable residents of new cities. Some of these services were provided in partnership with the State Emergency Service and the Ministry of Social Policy. Educational sessions were set up for internally displaced pupils to help them get back to a normal school routine and adjust to the new environment. Volunteers kept providing targeted help for most vulnerable, assisting them with basic goods, disability needs, and access to public benefits, but limited the number of people qualifying for it.

A coordination committee board of 23 people, mostly women, was established to identify the course of action. The board met weekly to discuss pressing issues and develop a strategy to tackle them. The engagement of core volunteers in 2014-2015 was very labour intensive, with most working long hours. Others contributed based on their time availability. During my fieldwork, IDPs themselves were engaged in the functioning of the network, doing many everyday tasks, like sorting out donated clothing, giving away care packages, etc. In many instances, the children of volunteers actively assisted their parents, for example, babysitting the children of IDPs so they could attend job interviews or training sessions. The use of familial, social and IDP-related networks points to creative ways in which volunteers sought to expand the outreach of assistance provision.

“Station Kharkiv”, on the initiative of its lead volunteer, adopted the Red Cross philosophy, claiming neutrality and human rights as its fundamental principles and refraining from political affiliations. My fieldwork took place a few months before the municipal elections in Ukraine when discussions about political loyalties were often tense. Volunteers kept political discussions away from the spaces of interaction with those internally displaced and simply emphasized their loyalty to Ukraine. The office was decorated with Ukrainian symbols, and all volunteers wore some Ukrainian attire to show that support for IDPs was from Ukrainians at large. Distancing from political affiliations and focusing on the donations of ordinary Ukrainians was posited as a guiding principle of engagement.

The scope of assistance provided by “Station Kharkiv” is difficult to estimate with precision. My respondents said they started out helping 5-7 families daily in spring of 2014, with the number increasing to 50 families per day in the following months. In August 2014, about 700-800 people arrived at Kharkiv’s train station every day, with many arrivals lacking documentation, basic clothing and money. The majority were in extreme distress and had no place to go. During this phase, the volunteer work was labour intensive and emotionally difficult. Apart from supplying basic needs, they helped IDPs deal with traumatic experiences of violence. Some arranged funerals for lost family members; they also assisted disabled IDPs with medical care and other pressing needs.

Over the course of one year, volunteers acquired considerable knowledge of issues related to IDPs and developed an extensive network of domestic and international partners. Cooperation ranged from local businesses and volunteer networks to international donors, including UNHCR, USAID and MOM. The network managed to secure grants from international organizations and employ some volunteers on a paid basis. They made links with other diasporas

around the world and established contact with a number of state institutions to jointly work on the resettlement of IDPs to other regions of Ukraine. “Station Kharkiv” has also grown regionally, opening up branches in Eastern Ukraine. These developments indicate that some sporadically formed networks managed to institutionalize and establish sustainable ways of functioning within the first year of war.

Similar initiatives emerged in other frontline cities where local residents got together to assist the internally displaced. “The Monster Corporation” was founded in Odesa in June 2014 to take care of orphan children arriving from the Donbas region. The orphans were housed in a summer sanatorium that had no heating system. Volunteers, with UNHCR assistance, managed to equip the premises with heat insulation, install a plumbing system and fix leaking roofs. The volunteer network partnered with a local religious community to resettle evacuated civilians and provide essential supplies for them. Church facilities were used for immediate assistance with IDPs eventually resettled to sanatoriums or placed in the houses of locals willing to shelter them. The religious community intended to create a housing settlement where IDPs could be fully self-sufficient. Farming and gardening were discussed as some of the options to enable IDPs provide for themselves. Whereas this network worked autonomously from the state, other volunteers noted that they cooperate with regional state authorities to assist the displaced. This was particularly the case in Dnipropetrovs’k, where volunteers partnered with local authorities bringing into existence “The Dnipro Help.” They reported intense cooperation with local bureaucrats and authorities in efforts to provide diverse assisting services to those arriving from the Donbas region.

Army-related volunteering (ATO)

The volunteer network “Nebaiduzhi liudy” (Caring People) is an officially registered charitable organization that emerged in Odesa sporadically in September 2014 to assist soldiers

and voluntary battalion fighters. In the summer of 2015, its leadership consisted of five female entrepreneurs, devoting their time and energy to the needs of war. Each volunteer had a clearly delineated sphere of responsibilities. Two delivered collected donations and supplies to the front, frequently travelling to the front. One volunteer dealt with the financial aspects, administering money donations, planning budget, locating best prices and communicating with retailers. The fourth core member focused on public relations. Since fundraising is an important part of volunteer work, taking care of social media accounts, answering questions, posting information about most urgent needs on Facebook and writing reports about delivered assistance are key to sustaining volunteer work. The fifth member dealt with the storage of donated items, sorting, packing and preparing parcels for delivery. Collectively, the core team attended media briefings and made organizational decisions on how to prioritize incoming requests.

The network had been able to increase its efficiency and expand its assistance capacity thanks to partnerships with other volunteer networks. For example, female volunteers informally known as “Spider Women” got together to knit camouflage nets and sew garments for the army, aligning their work with the needs of the army through “Nebaiduzhi liudy.” Occasionally, volunteers from “Sotnia Dalii Severyn” – a cooking network formed in the summer 2014 in Odesa provided food and care packages for “Nebaiduzhi liudy” to be delivered to soldiers. Two fundraising locations associated with the network had been set up by supermarkets with a few volunteers designated to collect money and food donations. A building known as “The Center for Patriotic Forces” unites several volunteer networks in Odesa, including “Nebaiduzhi liudy”. The network has also developed an extensive base of local sponsors who regularly donated money or provided much-needed goods free of charge or at discounted prices. The multi-layered structure

of the network and its extensive grassroots outreach allowed for high responsiveness to the needs of military units under its care.

The network has been able to sustain its work through the resourcefulness of its leadership and flexibility in recruiting volunteers. While core volunteers reported working on a full-time basis, others come when they can. In “Spider Women”, for example, women contribute hours based on their availability: employed women came after work, students helped after classes, and retired women joined based on their personal schedules. Some women volunteered on weekends. Others knitted camouflage nets or sew garments at home and brought them to the volunteer center. While there were clearly delineated areas of responsibilities in volunteering based on the type of assistance, in reality, there was considerable cross-cooperation among networks with volunteers sharing resources, knowledge and contacts.

As well as supplying food and equipment to the front, this cluster of volunteers also assisted the military to create livable conditions for soldiers and their families outside of the war zone. During my fieldwork, the volunteers of “Nebaiduzhi liudy” in cooperation with another volunteer network repaired deteriorating military buildings in Odesa. As two core volunteers explained, the buildings accommodating the families of soldiers had leaking roofs and were in poor condition. Unrepaired, the building would collapse, “leaving the families of the military on the street.” The volunteers fundraised for the construction materials and mobilized a team of construction workers to provide services free of charge. During my fieldwork, the volunteers called up on residents of Odesa at large to donate money or contribute labour to assist with this project. They also located other military units that needed maintenance work and identified the scope of repairs to be undertaken. This type of work has been undertaken based on a conviction that soldiers should have decent living conditions to carry out their military service properly. “They can’t focus

on military operations knowing that their families live in a half-ruined building with water dripping on the heads of their children,” remarked one of my respondents. As state authorities were too slow to react to the needs of soldiers, volunteers took it upon themselves to arrange decent living conditions for the military.

Volunteers from this cluster had very diverse, and often immensely difficult, preoccupations. Some engaged in search missions locating and identifying the bodies of killed soldiers. Four of my respondents directly dealt with this issue, making it their priority. They collected evidence, witness testimonies and statements of released detainees about the soldiers who went missing. They investigated and corroborated specific details, locations, maps and images related to the missing cases. All four respondents travelled to the conflict zone to compile evidence and inquire about specific soldiers. Volunteers conducted searches and digs to exhume bodies, sometimes in cooperation with state authorities. My respondents also informed the relatives of identified soldiers and worked to arrange the transportation of their remains to families. Constant encounters with death, body parts and grief took an incredibly high emotional toll on my respondents and exposed the challenges of civilian engagement amidst war.

Hospital Volunteering

A small public hospital in Dnipropetrovs’k is a good example of volunteer assistance to the injured combatants. My respondent, a doctor by profession, noted that volunteering at the hospital started with the provision of very basic things – supplies of pillows, bed sheets, mattresses, blankets, etc. when the intake of injured soldiers increased. In the first months of the war, injured soldiers were often delivered to hospitals with no documents, no money, no personal belongings at all. Volunteers found everything from cell phones, to tooth brushes, razors and medication. They also helped with documentation and transportation from one hospital to another. Female volunteers

mopped floors and dusted furniture. They took care of the injured and stayed on duty for night shifts, washing them, preparing sandwiches, coffee, tea and feeding the soldiers with missing limbs. While the quality of food at the hospital was decent, my respondents remarked, there was an understanding that patients enjoyed something homemade – a sign of additional care on behalf of community at large. Additional nutrition was provided by volunteers with homemade food donated by local residents. As time went on, volunteers accumulated other things as well, including an expensive clinical chemistry analyzer and other specialized apparatus. They also repaired the hospital with some renovations still happening in 2015, during my fieldwork. Among other things, elevators were fixed to transport immobile soldiers, water filters installed, leaking roof repaired and mold from the walls removed by volunteers. They also equipped some rooms items of conform, such as TVs, ebooks, kettles and fridges to ensure that soldiers' recovery takes place in decent environment. Increasingly, female volunteers engaged in trauma mediation and emotional labour towards the injured – the preoccupations discussed in more detail in Chapter on Gender Identities.

While the network primarily relied on donations collected from ordinary citizens, its lead volunteer was part of a larger volunteer network “National Defense Foundation.” The former was established in Dnipropetrovs’k in spring 2014 by regional elites to assist in the war effort and provide for the army. The Foundation united a number of volunteer initiatives, including a camouflage knitting battalion, a waiting room for soldiers at the Dnipropetrovs’k train station, and others. While the Foundation was associated with the “Ukrop Party,” ordinary volunteers espoused a varying degree of support for it and claimed they were part of the network simply to increase the efficiency and scope of their actions.

It is hard to estimate the number of the injured soldiers who received volunteers' assistance in this particular hospital. During the most intensive phase of fighting, the intake reportedly went up to 30 – 40 a day. There was a high turnover of patients with soldiers obtaining urgent treatment (surgeries) in the hospitals near the front and transferred to other regions right after. My respondent speculated that the network helped out thousands of soldiers coming from across Ukraine. Most volunteers I interviewed could not provide exact estimates of the amount of assistance they had provided overall. This points to the grassroots nature of volunteering, with people bringing food, clothing, packages to be delivered to war-affected communities – such support is difficult to account for. Most of them, however, managed to collect considerable funds and help hundreds, at times even thousands, of individuals.

In the sites of my fieldwork, all hospitals with high numbers of the injured soldiers had volunteer teams associated with them. Some managed to establish cooperation with the administration of the hospitals and create “volunteer headquarters” where soldiers could come for needed assistance. In Odesa and Kharkiv my respondents reported difficulties dealing with the hospital administrations, noting that volunteers were seen as intruding on medical treatment. My respondents speculated that the real reason behind the reluctance to cooperate with volunteers was a scant loyalty to Ukraine among some head personnel and their reliance on informal practices (bribe-asking) in treating patients. The presence of volunteers was undesirable as they exposed these illegal practices and demanded a fair treatment of combatants.

Beyond emergency assistance: rights-based interventions

The work of the Ukrainian volunteers is not static. They reorient their activities in accordance with new developments, opportunities and interpretations of the existing political and social realities. During my fieldwork, there was a growing consensus among volunteers that their

efforts should be refocused; they should turn their attention away from emergency assistance and focus on new and pressing issues. In this section, I explore the changing nature of volunteer work, showing that many came to be concerned with the *substantive citizenship* of those impacted by war. Substantive citizenship refers to one's *full* membership in the community in which one lives (Glenn 2009). This concept captures the difference between legal rights conferred on individuals through legislation and state policies on the one hand, and the (in)ability to access and exercise these rights on the other. An important implication of it is that it reveals that the location of citizenship goes beyond legal recognition to include the encounters of individuals with both the structures of governance and the everyday practices of community members (Glenn 2011; Nagra 2011; Staeheli et al. 2012; Petryna and Follis 2015).

I employ the concept of substantive citizenship to capture better the evolving nature of volunteer work. In conversations with my respondents, I heard multiple stories about the gap between legal rights conferred by the state on combatants and displaced persons and their realities on the ground. My respondents sought to address this disjuncture through their rights-related interventions. While the cases the volunteers dealt with were diverse, most revolved around the recognition of legal status, the correction of unjust treatment by local bureaucrats and military personnel and access to healthcare. These efforts were affectively charged and directed at making war-affected populations feel worthy members of the community – something the state often failed to do.

Recognition of legal status

The first two waves of demobilization in Ukraine occurred in the spring and early summer of 2015, with about 40,000 soldiers discharged from military service (Genshtab vidpravlyae 2015). During my fieldwork in May to September 2015, the recognition of war veteran

status was a major preoccupation for volunteers, as the legal mechanisms were unclear. Legally, those serving in the “anti-terrorist operation” (ATO) were to be recognized as war veterans and to receive the social entitlements conferred by this status. In reality, however, the achievement of legal recognition was rife with administrative hurdles, legal confusion and professional negligence. For example, some volunteers reported that military commanders frequently failed to properly document the performance of active duty by soldiers, or the timeframe and locations of service – information necessary to obtain the status of war veteran. Others noted the absence of unified documentation required for legal status recognition in the first months of war, with military commanders issuing proofs of service that were not accepted by the state institutions responsible for the recognition of status.

The mechanism to appeal the decisions of the committee determining status was vague and difficult to apply. Attempts to reapply for proper documentation often required demobilized soldiers to travel physically to the military unit of their service, creating additional problems, especially for those injured in the war. It was a problem because their access to healthcare and rehabilitation was contingent on the legal recognition of their status. These legal and bureaucratic inadequacies created serious delays in status recognition for the first waves of demobilized soldiers. One respondent commented, “soldiers demobilized a year ago after the Ilovaysk battle are still struggling to get a status of war veteran” (Odesa, Fieldwork, 12 July 2015).

Internally displaced persons faced a related set of issues, often struggling to get legal recognition of their status because of bureaucratic hurdles and the inaptness of legislation to deal with war realities. The absence of the legal framework to address the needs of IDPs in the first two years of the war and the inaptness of existing legislation to deal with war realities put IDPs in a precarious position. Many could not receive the minimum entitlements conferred to them by the

state.²⁵ The dire situation is exacerbated by the fact that most of registered IDPs belong to socially vulnerable categories, relying on welfare payments for survival.

The precariousness of IDPs with status recognition and applying for payments prompted some volunteers to assist with legal matters and status recognition.²⁶ This included the restoration of identity documents and a wide range of legal consultations. Discussing this type of work, one of my respondents said:

I help them restore official documents, because the procedures we previously had to restore lost documents are not equipped to deal with war realities! For example, there is a procedure of person identification that requires you to bring three people to confirm your identity - your relatives with documents showing family ties or people who used to share housing with you or lived on the same street. Some of the towns have been completely destroyed, making it impossible to contact one's neighbours. If you meet someone from the same town, it's already a big deal. People disperse fleeing violence and it's incredibly difficult to restore documentation based on the present procedures. (Kharkiv, Fieldwork, 12 June 2015)

Without identity documents, internally displaced persons are unable to access welfare support, apply for medical care or receive other services legally available to them. The absence of identity documents also precludes employment or the ability to rent accommodation, leaving already vulnerable individuals in an even more precarious position. Commenting on the delays caused by identity verification procedures, my respondent remarked that the only place where individuals without identity documentation could go was “a center for homeless people where all local bums reside. Even then, you need money for food. This is a problem with the system. How are they expected to survive?”

²⁵ IDPs unable to work receive financial support of 884 hryvnias (about 27 euros) with others receiving 442 hryvnias (about 14 euros). These payments are out of line with Ukraine's realities and do not allow IDPs to cover basic expenses, such as housing and food (IDP Report 2018).

²⁶ Multiple cases of family separations have been reported, including as a result of necessary documentation not being available (UNHRC 2016).

The most common way for volunteers to assist with status recognition was providing information about due process and the procedures of obtaining proper documents. Many of my respondents gave advice on the steps required to have their status recognized. Some located lawyers willing to help with individual cases free of charge or directly contacted military commanders responsible for missing documents to speed up the process. Other small but numerous interventions included giving people rides to the city administration or other public institutions to obtain documentation or contacting volunteers from other regions to help with specific cases. These seemingly trivial things were actually very important, as they ensured people knew about the mechanisms and could physically access the sites where their status could be confirmed and honored.

It is important to note that the volunteers went beyond the individual level to demand legislative changes. For example, volunteers from “Station Kharkiv” attended meetings and hearings at the Parliament related to IDPs in Ukraine and engaged in drafting legislative proposals to improve their situation. Similarly, a “women’s battalion” in Dnipropetrovs’k stated that its purpose was (and continues to be) to advocate for livable conditions for their enlisted husbands and their family members. As one of my respondents recounted, soldiers were stationed at the front for 10 months without rotation, relocation, or vacation, thus being deprived of the ability to recuperate. The women’s battalion worked to update legislation so that soldiers were stationed on the frontlines for not more than 45 days.

My respondents noted that the effectiveness of these efforts has been limited. A member of the women’s battalion said interventions at the individual level were more productive, while attempts to change legislation on service rotation yielded little return: “You know, the way the system works... It’s easier to deal with a request pertaining to an individual soldier. But we wanted

changes for the whole brigade. But all we encountered were talks, not real changes” (Dnipropetrov’sk, Fieldwork, 8 August 2015).

Bureaucratic deficiencies, sabotage and corruption at the local level

In addition to difficulties with status recognition, war veterans and soldiers faced multiple obstacles to access their rights because of corruption and legally dubious practices of local bureaucrats and military personnel. Legally, soldiers and war veterans are entitled to a set of social rights – such as access to land for personal use, reduced tariffs for utilities, subsidies for education, subsidized public transportation, annual financial assistance and other entitlements conferred by the status. In reality, however, numerous barriers prevented them from exercising their rights. Access to land is one example. According to Ukrainian law, war veterans have priority in improving their living accommodations and receiving land for individual construction and gardening.²⁷ In practice, however, they faced complications that one respondent, a demobilized soldier assisting war veterans, summarized this way:

When someone says “let’s give land to war veterans” - no one thinks where to get the land, how to allocate it, what is the process, where to go with a request like that. The procedures and mechanisms are not established. Volunteers - ordinary residents - take care of it, trying to understand how the process and procedures work. (Dnipropetrovs’k, Fieldwork, 13 August 2015)

Legal deficiencies in exercising rights were exacerbated by corrupt practices at the local level, whereby “land slots get into the hands of judges, or procurators instead of war veterans, because the former have access to land through their channels and connections,” my respondent noted.

²⁷ Law of Ukraine “About the Status of War Veterans and the Guarantee of their Social Protection,” from 1993 with subsequent amendments

To deal with legal unclarities and violations, volunteers from Dnipropetrovs'k created committees tasked with the oversight of policy implementation. A team of volunteers and demobilized soldiers joined the regional administration to ensure that war veterans could get access to land as required under Ukrainian law. A joint board of volunteers and war veterans was established to tackle the process of land distribution in the province (oblast') and to monitor the practices of local state bureaucrats and their willingness to assist war veterans in accessing their entitlements. "If a public official or mayor is doing a poor job regarding war veterans, we can request him or her to be fired," remarked my respondent. According to him, the board was successful in increasing the responsiveness of local state officials to the needs of war veterans and enacting the legislation on land entitlements in practice.

Another commonly reported case of volunteer intervention was linked to military higher-ups abusing the rights of 'regular soldiers' and taking advantage of their superior position. Volunteers cited frequent instances of injustice and corruption in the military at the outset of their engagement. For example, one of my respondents recalled seeing "immense injustices and corruption in the brigade with soldiers literally robbed by their superiors. Soldiers didn't receive uniforms and food that the Ministry of Defense allocated for their brigade and even wages were at times appropriated" (Odesa, Fieldwork, 12 July 2015). On more than a few occasions, volunteers had to intervene to contest the illegally imposed status of soldiers as "defectors" and ensure their legal restitution in the army:

When a soldier is injured, field medics provide him with first aid assistance and bring him to a local hospital for immediate treatment. Afterwards, he is transported to bigger hospitals in Dnipropetrovsk, Odesa or Kyiv, depending on the type and severity of the injury. Imagine, after the medical rehabilitation, the soldier goes back to his military base and they tell him "you are a defector". He explains that he was wounded and spent two months in a hospital, showing proper documentation, but he ends up listed as a defector in spite of the evidence. This is a typical situation. (Odesa, Fieldwork, 25 July 2015)

The practice to list soldiers as “defectors”, as my respondents explained, was one of the schemes through which brigade commanders appropriated soldiers’ salaries. Legally, when someone is listed as a “defector” from a military brigade, the commander is supposed to file proper documentation, and the Ministry of Defense will stop salary payments. In reality, no external reports are submitted, which means the Ministry keeps issuing salary payments, and these are allegedly appropriated by the soldier’s commanders. Other instances of money appropriation by local authorities or military commanders were referenced in interviews. One person complained that “instead of 600,000 hryvnias as set by the state, a soldier’s widow with four children receives 600 hryvnias.” She expressed a sentiment shared by many: “Where did the money go? Some people afford buying a third apartment, while soldiers and their families struggle to get by. It’s a common situation, really.”

Through conversations with volunteers, I discovered that despite their vulnerability and precariousness, soldiers and war veterans rarely contested their rights personally. Several reasons were given to explain the silence. One was the low legal literacy of rank-and-file soldiers and war veterans. A few respondents stressed that soldiers did not know their legal rights:

Our rank and file soldiers don’t know their rights. They don’t know what they are entitled to, what they are supposed to receive, what are the terms of provisions, how long his uniform is supposed to be in use, nothing! Most commanders don’t know that either. (Odesa, Fieldwork, 12 July 2015)

Legal illiteracy was especially common among conscripts and voluntary fighters from villages; they had few skills in terms of writing a complaint, restoring a salary or requesting a vacation or days off to visit sick family members. Some respondents remarked that this unawareness came from a broader ignorance of laws and legislation among Ukrainians; they said citizens were “poorly informed about their rights,” with “nobody knowing what the state is obliged to provide” more generally.

In contrast to the lack of awareness among low ranking soldiers, higher ranking officers and officials apparently knew all about “the loopholes of legislation” and used them to their benefit. At the same time, some volunteers said even high-ranking officers often lacked the knowledge necessary to conduct their duties competently. High internal rotations in the military and little professional training for some posts led to institutional incompetence. Professional ignorance and convoluted mechanisms for redress made rights violations commonplace, increasing the number of grievances.

Frequently, soldiers did not want to raise the issue of rights violations or mistreatment simply because of their fear of punishment by their superiors. Unequal power relations and inferior status in the army makes rank-and-file soldiers vulnerable vis-à-vis their commanders, who can reprimand them for “causing trouble” in the unit and exposing internal dealings to the public. “Soldiers are afraid to open their mouth and talk to their commanders,” said a respondent. “But someone has to raise these issues. Volunteers have nothing to lose”, she added.

Another reason cited for soldiers’ unwillingness to contest unlawful practices and advocate for their rights was the wartime distribution of responsibility; men’s duty was seen in relation to army service, while volunteers (generally women) provided support. Contingent on this gender dimension was the question of “military honor and sacrifice.” As some of my respondents noted, contesting rights and criticizing those in power was “below the dignity of soldier” because soldiers saw their duty as “the defense of the motherland” and attempted to defend it “to the best of their abilities” using the resources at hand. While this interpretation of military duty is idealized, it might have prevented some soldiers and war veterans from voicing concerns about the conditions of their military service or their treatment by commanders. Those who complained might be seen

as “too whiny” and not up to the task of military service, a perception occasioning social and professional costs.

Similarly, the rights of internally displaced persons were undermined at the local level by public servants. Reportedly, many bureaucrats derailed the process of legal status recognition, doing “everything possible to complicate life and create barriers for IDPs.” Allegedly, these practices were aimed at eliciting bribes and informal payments for their services. The demands for illegal payments were so pervasive, as one of my respondents remarked, that “even staff at morgue requests numerous documents and creates bureaucratic hurdles to elicit informal payments.” Distressed by a family loss, many found it easier to pay a bribe to cut through the red tape than to contest the illegal actions of public servants.

Volunteers adopted a number of tactics to contest legally dubious practices of bureaucrats and high-ranking officers. Establishing cooperation with professionals who consulted those affected by the war free of charge and guided them through court proceedings was one example. A respondent remarked, “With my lawyer, we fight against lawlessness. We contact people responsible for violations and work to address them” (Odesa, Fieldwork, 26 July 2015). Volunteers also engaged in educational campaigns targeted at increasing the level of professionalism in local bureaucracies, especially with respect to rights and entitlements. At times, they engaged in an oversight of policy implementation, ensuring that due process was followed in interactions between war-affected individuals and bureaucratic representatives. In cases when cooperation with local bureaucrats was possible, volunteers worked to expand their capacity to provide services to an increased number of recipients.

Access to healthcare

Another area where factual rights starkly deviated from official ones was healthcare provision. Under Ukrainian healthcare legislation, those affected by war have a legal right to free medical treatment. My respondents reported a profound disconnect between this and the reality on the ground. Some difficulties with free access to healthcare stemmed from bureaucratic inadequacies; for example, an injured soldier could arrive at a hospital and have “to prove that he lost his leg on the front, even though it’s clear as day” to qualify for free treatment. Difficulties accessing free healthcare for injured soldiers were more frequently caused by a lack of proper documentation verifying the soldiers’ status. Without official papers, the costs of certain medical treatment are not covered by the state. In these instances, volunteers intervened to help soldiers navigate the confusing process of obtaining documents necessary for free medical services, ensure proper quality of care and pay the expenses not covered by the state.

More importantly, the prevalence of informal payments in the healthcare industry profoundly complicated access to medical care and IDPs and combatants were asked for money in exchange for services which they were supposed to receive free of charge. As ethnographic research by Polese (2008; 2014) shows, healthcare workers do not necessarily see these practices as problematic, considering them a fairer way of compensation in an environment where their work is severely underpaid. While some payments hinged on the willingness of the patient to “thank” the health care provider, others were not voluntary, with IDPs “pressured” to pay. Outside the volunteer assistance, displaced patients had very few venues for recourse:

If you don’t call, don’t ask someone who has influence over the head doctor of this specific maternity clinic, a pregnant displaced woman will be pressured to pay for services and diagnostics, giving away her last 100 hryvnias (about \$10 at the time of fieldwork) for medical exams. Then, the payment will be listed as a “charitable donation.” They have no right to do that, to pressure people and extort money for these services. (Kharkiv, Fieldwork, 8 June 2015)

In addition, displaced persons and injured soldiers undergoing treatment at hospitals outside their place of residence were likely to find themselves in unfamiliar terrain, where they have no social contacts and lack all knowledge of the local bureaucracy. In environments with high degrees of informality embedded in the service provision (as in Ukraine), everything functions through personal connections. Access to services often relies on local knowledge of “contacting the right person” or “knowing how to get things done”. In these instances, citizenship rights become “personalised” and “localised” (Glenn 2009; Staeheli et al. 2012). The ability to access services and rights in these locales depends on personal connections and the ability to “later reciprocate” for the services. In these contexts, the loss of social contacts because of displacement carries high costs; simply stated, war-affected populations have no leverage to negotiate the conditions of service provision.

Given the importance of personal connections in rights enactment, volunteers saw themselves as more *fitting* to address instances of unjust treatment and corruption. More specifically, their social capital amassed from their prewar lives and knowledge of local bureaucracies often proved invaluable. Many used their personal and professional connections to interact with street level bureaucrats more effectively. In addition, over the course of volunteering, their social networks substantially expanded, increasing their ability to solve problems and remove bureaucratic obstacles. The acquired knowledge of legal provisions and regulations vis-à-vis soldiers and IDPs sustained and drove their volunteer work. As it was noted, the knowledge of local bureaucracies and extensive social and professional networks are especially important in environments with high levels of informality as they act as safety nets against state’s failures to provide services and care for its citizens.

The volunteers I interviewed also worked to address bribe-asking in the medical sphere. At times, this was done through public pressure, with volunteers talking to media outlets about bribes and illegal payments elicited by medical personnel. Often, however, volunteers tried to avoid open confrontation with bureaucrats and doctors, working to tackle these cases “diplomatically” instead. In part, this had to do with the dependency of IDPs and soldiers on service provision; volunteers often had to contact doctors with urgent requests for medical assistance and rely on the cooperation of medical personnel previously engaged in dubious practices. Instead of direct confrontation, some volunteers reported resorting to “blackmail”; they said they threatened doctors with media exposure and public shaming for engaging in unlawful transactions and demanded they not engage in illegal practices vis-à-vis war-affected individuals in the future. Public officials were faced with the choice of either fixing the wrongdoing or suffering reputational damage from negative publicity.

One reason for the volunteers’ reluctance to publicly confront doctors had to do with the limited capacity of hospitals to tackle the influx of patients in the regions close to the frontlines. As previously noted, the number of patients in the cities bordering the warzone rose alarmingly, but the city budgets were not adjusted accordingly. These specific constraints in service provision point to the territorial aspects of rights provision, what Staeheli et al. (2012) term the *spaciality* of citizenship. Within one state, elements of citizenship can be constructed and developed unevenly, creating apparent contradictions in the treatment of particular groups across space. While in some localities, state officials work to recognize and enact the rights of these groups, in others, they might be reluctant to do so or face additional constraints in providing services. The territorially uneven displacement of people across Ukraine created pockets of heightened precarity near the war zone and imposed territory-specific demands on local bureaucracies to deal with them. This

led to the surge in discretionary decision making of local bureaucrats, leaving war-affected individuals unprotected against violations and discretion.

Whenever possible, volunteers worked hard to extend the capacity of hospitals to provide treatment for the internally displaced. In numerous instances of partnership, volunteers fundraised for expensive medication. Commenting on the specifics, one of my respondents remarked, “from the very beginning, we started covering the costs of dialysis (necessary for patients with kidney failures), because it’s very expensive. Some patients need it 2-3 times a week. These people would die without our help with medication.” Similarly, funds were raised for diabetic patients and surgeries to make sure IDPs could access free treatment. As my respondent made clear, a driving force behind this assistance was the recognition of the precarity and vulnerability of patients who had no money to cover the costs of treatment and relied on others for survival. In these and other instances, the decisions to help were based on the personal judgements of volunteers. Through rights-related interventions, volunteers made public services available for these groups, expanding the outreach of the state to areas where state support was lacking. In this way, they redistributed welfare and public service provision, restructuring them from below.

The engagement of volunteers in securing the legal rights of soldiers and IDPs drew on their understanding of fairness and moral obligation towards those most affected. They recognized the inadequacies of the state and worked to compensate for them. Volunteers engaged in work aimed at emphasizing and, at times, constructing social categories of signification where war-affected individuals are differentiated from others on the grounds of their war-inflicted precarity, but are not denigrated for this difference. In this respect, some of my respondents emphasized that their efforts to take care of the injured and displaced were driven by a desire to show the war-affected that they were safe and valued outside their immediate communities. Some of my

respondents noted that, together with others, they work to make war veterans socially respected, valued and successful after military service by enacting their rights and protecting their social status after demobilization.

Philosophies of care often recognize the importance of individual and human rights while placing focus on reciprocity and solidarity (Staheli et al 2012). Many female volunteers stated that their main goal was not to address all needs generated by war, but to ensure that “no soldier seeking assistance leaves without a hug or a word of gratitude,” thus demonstrating that military service was appreciated by the community at large and reciprocated through emotional and physical labour. Affective engagement of female volunteers worked to express gratitude to soldiers on the front and show care for those in the hospitals. Symbolically, it was an important sign of reciprocity. Many noted that the synergy between (predominantly female) volunteers and soldiers is of paramount significance because it addresses a sense of disillusionment among combatants about a lack of change and shows soldiers and war veterans that “there are people out there worth fighting for” (Odesa, Fieldwork, 12 July 2015). Volunteer engagement sustained military service through war-engendered ties of solidarity.

The concept of “affect” is useful to understand sustained volunteer engagement. While the initial reasons for joining volunteer networks are discussed in the next chapter, long-term participation is fostered through new friendships and reciprocal obligations conceived within a national framework. New structures of feelings emerge in volunteer sites where the bodies of soldiers are recognized simultaneously as vulnerable because of arduous military service conditions and heroic because they are associated with defense and safety. Female volunteers invest emotional labour to care and attend to the needs of combatants on the frontlines and away from them. Their efforts have a certain directionality. While directed towards specific soldiers and

their needs, they symbolically represent care and affection for all Ukrainian soldiers who are praised for sacrificing their lives for the sake of the country and women. I discuss the affective side of volunteer work and its gendered nature in the Chapter on Gender Identities. While the logic that sustains engagement for internally displaced persons is different, it is also sustained through affect. Volunteers recognize the immense precarity of people who had to flee violence and acknowledge their need not only for material, but also for emotional assistance. In other words, they govern their engagement through affect that attaches itself to the bodies of internally displaced people and defines strategies and attitudes of volunteer engagement. Claims to “difference” underpin volunteer work as volunteers produce discourses to position both combatants and IDPs differently in terms of access to resources and rights provision.

Drawing on the theoretical insights of Fortier (2016) and others, I propose that these small and big interventions should be seen as “affective acts of citizenship.” This is because the practices of volunteers redefine the boundaries of worthiness and entitlements in relation to IDPs and combatants and reclaim or enact their rights. As such, these practices are aimed at making citizenship *substantive* for these categories of people and ensuring that they can access and exercise their legitimate rights. These acts of citizenship are *affective* in nature, because they involve the production of affective bonds in relation to specific subjects (groups). They take place in specific sites and settings that allow volunteers to transform their private feelings into public action. As Fortier notes, acts of affective citizenship are “at once deeply felt and embodied and social and public” (2016: 1039).

These acts of citizenship, multiple small and larger scale volunteer interventions, have implications beyond the enactment of rights and entitlements. They influenced the sense of belonging of war-affected populations, partly addressing their social alienation outside of their

immediate communities through the display of genuine care and support. The efforts of volunteers reaffirmed the worthiness and personhood of vulnerable individuals, recognizing their precarity amidst the failure of the state to care for them. In this way, volunteers de-individualized the grievances of soldiers and displaced individuals, showing that their struggles were collective concerns and they were members of a larger community. In doing so, they built emotional attachments and fostered solidarities between those heavily affected by war and the larger society. Affective engagement worked to expand the space of belonging of those impacted by war beyond their familial and immediate social circles. It creates new connections, bonds and friendships.

These interventions carry a special significance given the ambiguity and unevenness of war in Ukraine, where Ukrainian combatants are not always seen as defending the country, but engaging in a fratricidal war against the Donbas residents. Similarly, IDPs are not always recognized for their precarious position, with some holding them responsible for the violence on Donbas and accusing of not being loyal enough to Ukraine or not actively resisting the armored insurrection in their region of residence.

Chapter 4. Wartime civilian volunteers: demographic profile, motivations and pathways to engagement

The previous chapter demonstrated that many civilians responded to the outbreak of war by donating their resources, energy and time to assist combatants and internally displaced persons, in the context of insufficient state response. This chapter addresses the micro-level dynamics of civilian mobilization. More specifically, it answers the following questions: What was the socio-economic profile of volunteers? What initiated and drove their engagement? What types of networks were crucial for war-driven mobilization? In tackling these three questions, the chapter contributes to the literature on civilian grassroots mobilization amidst war and examines how communities, previously classified as passive, become active in crisis.

As stated in the introduction, previous studies on war and collective action emphasized the importance of pre-existing networks and partnerships with the government as crucial factors that facilitate collective action in wartime and increase the outreach of civilian organisations. Since Ukrainian civilians in the frontline regions mobilized without strong government support or formally existing networks, we need to assess the factors that promoted the emergence of volunteer networks amidst the military and humanitarian crisis. Weaving together the demographic characteristics of volunteers, their motivations and pathways to engagement, the chapter aims at apprehending the dynamics of collective action at the rear in the environment of limited statehood and ostensible absence of pre-existing networks for mobilization.

The chapter contains four sections. First, it provides historical context for public (dis)engagement prior to war. Emphasizing the changes since Maidan, it then examines the demographic profile of wartime volunteers and looks at their age, gender, occupational and ethno-linguistic characteristics. It shows that most volunteers are new actors in public affairs and their

engagement has been initiated and sustained through local and affective concerns. Contrary to mainstream narratives that posit volunteering as a practice generated by patriotism, the chapter finds that for many, volunteering emerged as a coping mechanism against looming uncertainty in the frontlines and the fear of violence spillover. Others became engaged out of humanitarian concerns, responding to the precarity of war-affected individuals and combatants. A sense of heightened national belonging and allegiance to the state developed as a result of wartime engagement, not as a precursor. Analysing the pathways to volunteering, the chapter explores the role of Maidan protests in providing organizational structure for civilian mobilization and discusses the reorientation of vibrant private and entrepreneurial networks to meet war needs. Contrary to the literature that sees strong private networks as inimical to broader engagement, it finds private connections were crucial in the creation and organizational success of informal networks, as volunteers capitalised on the trust and efficiency imbued in them. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the dynamics of civilian mobilization at the rear, emphasizing its developmental effects on volunteers.

Public (dis)engagement prior to war

The Soviet Union sought to eliminate civil society from 1917 to 1985 (Alekseeva and Fitzpatrick 1990). With a varying degree of success, the Communist Party worked to ensure that citizens speak with one voice, reproducing the Party line. Repression, imprisonment, labour camps and exile were pervasively used against dissenting opinions in the Soviet Union. Because of this, the existence of private associations was scarce, short and severely limited in membership (ibid). During Stalin rule, the authorities were quick to confront and characterize any private associations as “anti-Soviet” and sentence its founders to years of detention, if not execution. It resulted in the

privatization of the public sphere in the Soviet Union with people withdrawing their energies and emotions from the public space (Shlapentokh 1989).

In the 60s, after Stalin's death, the situation somewhat improved with organising primarily happening in non-political spheres (Alekseeva and Fitzpatrick 1990). This included literary, cultural, scientific and sports niches, as well as amateur gatherings to study philosophy, art and folklore. The authorities generally allowed the existence of these groups, but consistently harassed its leaders with surveillance, incarceration and psychiatric detention. Any political forms of organizing remained forbidden and punished (ibid). The political climate for public participation improved in the glasnost' years, with more freedom given to unions, clubs and associations under Gorbachev's leadership.²⁸ While arrests and detentions were still deployed as means to contain political dissent, sentences were considerably milder and activists were released within a few hours of detention.

Whereas political and public participation was repressed, the Communist Party obliged its citizens to partake in public events and rituals (Bell et al. 2011). One of these mandatory practices pertained to "involuntary volunteering", which was a "collective, compulsory, rigidly organized, and centrally directed form of unpaid labour" (ibid. 2011: 175) across Communist states. One example of compulsory volunteering was annual Saturday environment cleaning campaigns organized in honour of Lenin's birthday (Pranaityte 2015). Other examples include unpaid work in social organisations, cultural activities and trade unions. These initiatives were planned in a centralised manner and spread from the Union to the country level (ibid). While the participation in these activities was mandatory, Yurchak (2013) notes that people's relations to

²⁸ Drawing on Soviet sociologists, Alekseeva and Fitzpatrick (1990) contend that there were between 800,000 and 3.15 million unofficial youth groups during the perestroika period. About 10 percent of them can be classified as holding political discussions.

state-imposed practices and ideology were complex, often bringing around unanticipated consequences. Soviet citizens found creative ways to engage with state-mandated practices on their own terms, making these practices meaningful to them. Creative engagement with state rituals and practices allowed for new communities, identities and pursuits to emerge and for new social relations, solidarities and commonalities to be fostered (Yurchak 2013)

While the positive effects of state-led practices pertain to a higher level of social connectedness, Bell et al. (2011) contends that mandatory participation of individuals in volunteer initiatives negatively impacted recruitment and motivation for engagement. A lack of grassroots leadership and knowledge when it comes to volunteer work negatively impacted the dynamics of voluntary participation in the years following the end of the Soviet Union and resulted in low recruitment and retention rates. Another implication of imposed engagement was a sense of resentment among some individuals towards state-mandated voluntary activities. Pranaityte states that these negative perceptions of voluntary engagement profoundly influenced the willingness of individuals to seek opportunities for broader engagement during Ukraine's independence and created distrust around those motivated to do so (2015).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, "involuntary voluntarism" was abolished and formal restrictions on civil and political rights were removed (Pranaityte 2015). Rapid political change broadened autonomous space for non-state actors to organize socially and politically, but the orientation of change was not defined. Scholars noted that structural opportunities have not led to the meaningful engagement of societal actors into decision-making processes and the establishment of new institutions based on fairness, transparency and accountability. Some emphasized the legacy of communism as suppressing public participation and its efficiency. Along this logic of thinking, Howard (2002a) names Soviet negative experiences with state-controlled

organisations and forced voluntarism, the development of strong personal connections to overcome the inability to express freely in the public and the disillusionment following the fall of the Soviet Union as the main factors undermining broader participation. Others point out the rise of strong patronage networks and economic inequalities in the 1990s created dramatic power asymmetries between the political elites and societal actors, making the latter susceptible to manipulation and fixating them on short-term benefits (Kudelia 2007). Long lasting historical and linguistic cleavages within countries further fractured the social fabric of post-Soviet societies, making them marginal to state-building processes. As pointed out by Kudelia, “most post-Soviet constitutional arrangements were imposed on the societies without any serious public involvement and legitimized through dubious referenda” (Kudelia 2007). The public participation that did take place in the years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union marginalised women and advantaged men, masculinising the public sphere (Watson 1993).

One segment of civil society that has been relatively strong in independent Ukraine is the NGO sector. According to estimates, there were more than 40,000 NGOs registered in the country by the beginning of 2003. However, experts indicate that only 10 percent of these organisations were “really working” (Pidluska et al. 2003 cited in Stepanenko 2006).²⁹ While thriving in terms of numbers, NGOs had stifled capacity and efficiency. Their strong dependence on external funding and agenda setting by outside actors diminished their effectiveness. Moreover, NGOs in Ukraine were unable to garner wider social support for their activities. As demonstrated by Petrova and Tarrow (2007), their ability to organize non-state actors and political parties to advance a cause has been substantial. Yet, they have been mainly unsuccessful in seeking support

²⁹ According to the State Statistics Department, there were 17,726 charity organisations registered in Ukraine as of January 2018. Most of them, however, exist only on paper. Experts estimate that only 500-1000 charity organisations in Ukraine function properly (Corestone Goup and GfK 2018).

from the wider population. By and large, the third sector proved incapable of generating participatory activism that would unite individuals and interest groups around common goals. As a result, NGOs have been termed as “officers without armies whose goals may drift away from the needs of those they claim to represent” (Petrova and Tarrow 2007: 88). Non-participation in the third sector has been reflective of a general trend in the Ukrainian society, where individuals rarely engaged in membership organisations of any sort (Howard 2002a). Thus, an essential dimension of civil society based on volunteering and individual participation has largely been missing in Ukraine.

Some scholars contend that the 2004 Orange Revolution transformed the country, prompting a consolidation of informal social networks and increasing their political salience. The Orange Revolution unfolded in the aftermath of the presidential elections to contest its results and voice concerns about corruption, electoral fraud and voter intimidation. According to Polese (2009), it brought in new civic actors on the stage and formalised previously informal networks into a more cohesive civil society aimed at political change. The youth movement ‘PORA!’ (IT’S TIME!), mostly preoccupied with bringing people on the streets during the revolution, directed the energies of its supporters towards political participation after the Orange Revolution. Its activities “tied up civil society” and prompted a rapid transformation of the civil landscape of Ukraine (Polese 2009).

Yet, the enthusiasm about the Orange Revolution is not widely shared. An in-depth study of transformations often associated with the protests shows that the massive social mobilization failed to result into the institutionalization and strengthening of civil society. Tracing changes that occurred in the NGO sector after the Orange Revolution, Stewart (2009) notes that there has been less progress made than initially anticipated by activists and external observers.

While the Orange Revolution initially raised awareness of the importance of civil society, substantial changes didn't take root. NGOs remained to be disconnected from broader society and incapable of stirring a constructive dialogue between government and civil actors.

Several scholars (Beissinger 2013; Stepanenko 2006; Way 2014) argue that the Orange Revolution cannot be classified as the conscious reaction by a developed and organized civil society. Along these lines, Beissinger (2013) demonstrates that the Orange Revolution was a “negative coalition” where the protesters “knew what they stood against”, but had no vision on how to be a constructive agent of change, once the anti-incumbency goal was achieved. Given a lack of broader goals, the protesters quickly disseminated from the public arena, failing to defend the ideals originally advanced by the Revolution. Similarly, Stepanenko (2006) concludes that the mass public activism seen during the Orange Revolution reflected the widespread emotional reaction of indignation and resentment of many hundreds of thousands of protesters, as many believed that their voices had been stolen in the elections. Yet, the protest failed to engender institutionalized forms of civic engagement that could bring about change in political and social practices.

The weakness of civil society was noticeable at the outset of the Maidan protests. Two key features of the initial mobilization are indicative of that. Firstly, the protests were spontaneously triggered by Mustafa Nayyem, a Ukrainian journalist of Afghani origin, rather than by a previously established civic network. Secondly, only a small fraction of the protesters (8 percent) came with the help of a political party or another organisation, according to the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (Kiev International 2013). The overwhelming majority of people arranged their own transportation to Maidan. As stated by Way (2014), one of the roles of civil society is to mobilize people and bring them into the streets when a legitimate cause arises.

Yet, the evidence suggests that institutionalized civil actors were largely uninvolved in the mass mobilization on the ground. The fact that the protests began spontaneously showed that the Maidan protests were driven by ordinary citizens, rather than the third sector or other civil society actors. The reported motives that brought and kept people onto the streets were the cruel repression of the government against the protesters (61 percent), demands for broader political change in Ukraine (51 percent) and determination to change the government in Ukraine (46 percent) (Kiev International 2014).

Surveys conducted during the Maidan attest to the fact that the mobilization was primarily driven by ordinary citizens. In the initial stage of the protests, youth and students played a key role in steering engagement. In the later phases of the demonstrations, however, the composition of protesters changed significantly. The study conducted by Onuch (2014) shows that two thirds of individuals joining the ranks of the protesters after the first outbreak of violence were older than 30, with an average age of almost 36 (2014: 47). The median protester, Onuch contends, was a male between 34 and 45 years old. Most of them had a full-time job and a higher than average amount of schooling and experienced very limited contact with formal groups (ibid). The findings of this study are consistent with larger-scale surveys conducted on Maidan, which indicate that only 7.7 percent of the protesters were members of any political party in January of 2014 (Kiev International 2014). A notable exception to that were participants from far-right groups. A systemic analysis conducted by Ishchenko (2016) shows that far-right Svoboda party, founded in 1991 as the Social-National Party of Ukraine and Pravy Sector, a Maidan-forged collation of previously marginal far-right organizations, were major collective actors during the protests and managed to mobilize resources, bring their supporters and influence the dynamics of the protests in significant ways. It is important to note that half of the protesters were residents of

Kyiv (49.8 percent) and half of the protesters came from other regions of Ukraine (Oblychchia Evromaidany 2014). Regionally, the protesters overwhelmingly came from Western (55 percent) and Central Ukraine (24 percent), with Southern and Eastern regions comprising 21 percent of the protesters (Kiev International 2014).

As these studies reveal, there was a lack of formal societal participation prior to war, outside of the NGO sector. There were instances of mass mobilization in Ukraine since independence, but they did not translate into sustained engagement. As Onuch and Onuch (2011) state, Ukraine saw “democratic moments” rather than “democratic movements” because mass mobilization did not result in substantive change. The recent Maidan uprisings were a watershed in the social and political life in Ukraine, but its legacy has not been settled yet. Some claim that “tectonic shift in Ukraine’s political culture, social arrangements, and people’s mentality have occurred” (Bertelsen 2017) with the country experiencing “civic transformation” (Krasynska and Martin 2017: 2016). Others noted paradoxical developments since the Maidan protests with Minakov (2015b) pointing to the risks civil society poses to the state’s monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. In view of recent events, a number of scholars set out to reevaluate the claim about the “weakness” of civil society in Ukraine, noting that formal membership organisations might poorly capture the state of civil society in countries like Ukraine where informality undergirds social and political life (Burlyuk et al. 2017; Krasynska and Martin 2017; Krasynska 2017).

The demographic profile of war volunteers

War-driven mobilization occurred immediately after the Maidan protests. In the months following the outbreak of war, Ukraine saw a burst in volunteering and charitable activities. The quantitative aspects of volunteering are difficult to estimate because of its grassroots nature. According to the UN estimates, there were 750 volunteer groups in Ukraine helping the army and

IDPs with 75,000 people engaged in volunteer work (Volonters'koie dvizhenie 2014). The GfK survey suggests that 2.5 percent of the Ukrainian population engaged in volunteer work to assist the army and the injured and 0.7 percent helped out IDPs – approximately 105,000 and 60,000 individuals respectively (Corestone Group and GfK 2018). Volunteer assistance drew on larger societal support with many more people donating for the military and those displaced. Surveys indicate that volunteers enjoy the second highest level of social trust in Ukraine, following religious organizations (Kiev International 2017).³⁰ Reliable data on the regional breakdown of volunteer engagement are not available, but residents of Kyiv and Western regions have been noted to be more active in volunteer initiatives generally (Corestone Group and GfK 2018). This, however, does not provide us with credible information about the dynamics and intensity of war volunteering across Ukraine and the frontline regions in particular. Similarly, the data about the demographic profile of volunteers are lacking.

How does the demographic profile of volunteers compare to that of the protesters and correlate with the previous findings about low levels of public engagement in Ukraine? This section looks at the socio-economic and ethno-linguistic characteristics of war volunteers and notes their previous history of public engagement. I draw on interviews with 95 volunteers to provide an account of who joined and suggest some of the larger patterns of rearward grassroots mobilization in Ukraine. I substantiate some of my findings by other studies conducted on volunteer initiatives and grassroots mobilization.

The studies documenting low public participation before the war are consistent with my data. Only ten volunteers out of 95 reported being active in community affairs and/or political life

³⁰ A survey conducted by KIIS found 53.5 percent of Ukrainians trust volunteers, while 56.7 trust the church (Kiev International 2017). In contrast, the Parliament is trusted by 5.3 percent of Ukrainians, the President by 11.7 percent and the government by 9.5 percent.

at the local level before the war. One was a member of a political party, mostly channeling efforts into issues of identity and Ukrainian language use in Kharkiv. Three volunteers from Odesa and Kharkiv were actively engaged in volunteer initiatives aimed at increasing the use of the Ukrainian language and the knowledge of Ukrainian history among Russian speakers. Three other volunteers in Odesa had a church affiliation through which they participated in community life by helping the most disadvantaged categories – drug addicts and single mothers. Finally, two volunteers from Odesa reported volunteer work on various social issues before the war: providing humanitarian assistance to World War II veterans, organizing a dog shelter, supporting cancer patients and other initiatives. A few noted that they had supported their elderly neighbours or vulnerable individuals with small financial donations, but they did not see this as community work.

Two thirds of the volunteers I interviewed reported not participating in any associations outside work or family and said they were not engaged in any community initiatives before the war. Most noted that they were focused exclusively on family and professional life and did not reflect on social and political developments in the country. They talked about economic survival as a barrier for broader engagement. A few noted that a profound sense of powerlessness to influence the developments in the country and disillusionment about fellow citizens incapable of action suppressed their willingness to engage. The developments after the Orange Revolution amplified the sense of disillusionment as the Revolution did not translate into any tangible political change.³¹

The Maidan protests present a notable exception to this disengagement. About one third of my respondents, 34 out of 95 volunteers, reported participating in the protests, joining the demonstrations either in Kyiv or their cities of residence. Their participation was diverse, ranging

³¹ I did not systematically analyze the participation of my respondents in the Orange Revolution, but some of them mentioned that they took part in it or supported it in general.

from full-fledged engagement, with frequent trips to Kyiv to more occasional visits. Ten volunteers said they supported the protesters but did not personally participate in the demonstrations. Family and professional commitments were cited as preventing more active engagement. A few confided that they were fearful to go to the streets because of security risks associated with participation. Five reported that the protests caught their attention only in the latest phase, when people were shot in Kyiv. Around that time, they started actively following developments, eventually engaging in volunteer work. The rest, over one third of all interviewed volunteers, indicated that they did not take an interest in the Maidan protests and became concerned with the developments in Ukraine only after the demonstrations ended and violence broke out.

The majority of my respondents referenced the economic and professional instability of the 1990s as the main reason of their previous disengagement. They noted that the volatile environment after Ukraine's independence made them focus on the well-being of their families at the expense of broader engagement. The preoccupations about the economic stability might have to do with the fact that many volunteers I interviewed came of age in the 1990s, in the midst of acute economic and political transformation. My fieldwork data indicate that the majority of 95 interviewed volunteers were in the middle age category. More precisely, about half were in a young middle age category, from 30 to 40 years old. This is particularly true of the lead volunteers (38 individuals in total), two thirds of whom were between 30 and 40 when they joined volunteer networks. About one third were 41 to 50 years old at the time of fieldwork. Only 18 volunteers fell outside these age ranges, being either younger than 30 or older than 50. These data indicate that middle-aged individuals were more likely to join volunteer networks and play a central role in organizing assistance to combatants and IDPs. It is plausible to suggest that this is the case because they had more resources and experience at hand compared to youth and stronger organizing skills

compared to those in the older age category. One can assume that individuals whose formative years coincided with the profound economic, political and economic instability of the transition period acquired competences necessary for the organizational success of volunteer efforts, such as agility, flexibility, entrepreneurial spirit of surviving in the unstable environment.

This assumption is particularly credible, if we consider the economic stratification of volunteers. My data indicate a high presence of small and medium entrepreneurs in volunteer networks. About one third of all respondents, 33 out of 95, reported being small or medium business entrepreneurs, either owning a family business or creating employment for themselves.³² The number of entrepreneurs was especially high among lead volunteers, with 21 out of 38 reporting owning a business of some sort. These included a family-based legal consultancy company in Dnipropetrovs'k, an IT business in Kharkiv, a tourist agency in Dnipropetrovs'k, an entrepreneurial business in Barabashovo market in Kharkiv, and small scale entrepreneurial activities, such as handmade toys for sale.³³ As my respondents indicated, their entrepreneurial status made them likely targets for assistance requests with people asking them to donate resources or help in other ways. Some stated that they were able to “afford” volunteering due to the flexibility of their working schedules, the availability of material resources and skills in resource management. Entrepreneurs participating in the Maidan protests comprised only 9.3 percent of all protesters (Oblychchia Evromaidany 2014), suggesting entrepreneurs became more active in war-driven mobilization, spearheading the formation of volunteer networks.

³² Entrepreneurship in Ukraine includes a wide scope of activities, ranging from owning a business to engaging in petty trade or creating employment for oneself (Williams 2008; Aidis et al. 2007). Entrepreneurs in volunteer networks show this diversity.

³³ Barabashovo market is located in Kharkiv, Eastern Ukraine. It is one of the largest in Europe, occupying 75 hectares.

Other volunteers had different economic and occupational backgrounds, from students to pensioners and professionals of various sectors. Doctors, psychologists and lawyers played an active role in the volunteer efforts as their professional skills and competence were especially valuable in attempts to cope with the traumatic consequences of war and protect the rights of combatants and displaced persons. Whereas entrepreneurial skills, resources and infrastructure were crucial for the organizational success of volunteer work, the scope, reach and sustainability of volunteerism owed much to the participation of individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds and their ongoing contributions. The informal nature of volunteering with flexible hours of work and a wide range of needs allowed people of different economic backgrounds to find space for engagement on terms acceptable for them. There was a general sense that the strength of the volunteer movement lies in its popular support where “everyone can contribute as much as they can” and “no help is too small to count.”

In terms of gender patterns, my data suggest that women were more active in volunteering, taking up both supportive and leadership positions. More than two thirds (73 out of 95) of interviewed volunteers were women. Some volunteer networks – cooking battalions, camouflage knitting squads and hospital groups and groups taking care of the internally displaced – were female initiatives with men helping occasionally or providing financial support. Volunteer networks assisting the army and voluntary battalions were gender-mixed, with men and women participating in different capacities. The asymmetrical gender composition of Ukrainian volunteer networks is indicative of the gender-charged nature of wartime mobilization. While men were called up to take up arms and fight for the country, women saw it as their responsibility to protect and supply for those on the front.³⁴ The endless scope of needs generated by war engaged many

³⁴ I provide a more detailed analysis of the gender asymmetrical composition of volunteer networks in the Chapter on Gender Identities.

women in war-related initiatives on the front and away from it. Female volunteers also provided emotional support to the combatants and IDPs, mediating trauma and dealing their distress.

A considerable number of women I interviewed had entrepreneurial background that helped them organize extensive supply chains to the front and secure resources for combatants and IDPs. A high presence of female entrepreneurs in lead positions of volunteering demonstrates that the intersection of gender, class and occupation were key in driving and sustaining engagement at the rear. This reality should be understood in the context of Ukraine's efforts to transition to a market economy, the ensuing economic decline and the coping strategies engendered by it (Welter and Smallbone 2010). The decision to become an entrepreneur in Ukraine has been theorized as a household survival strategy amidst economic decline and professional displacement. Kalantaridis et al. state: "These strategies invariably involve the exploitation of the household's resources, of which human capital is often the foremost, in meeting the needs of the family members" (2004: 665). Many of my respondents reported having a family business, with both partners engaged in it. After the outbreak of war, women seemed to be more likely to become volunteers, as many tasks were associated with female labour. Female entrepreneurs used their entrepreneurial skills of resource management to enlarge the scope of assistance. In contrast, male entrepreneurs remained in charge of the family business and assisted volunteers indirectly by providing money, resources and occasional physical labour.

When it comes to the ethnic composition of volunteer networks, it is difficult, if not impossible, to compile credible data. Most of my respondents indicated being of mixed ethnic origin. The combination of Ukrainian and Russian ethnic background was most common; some reported having Belarusian, Bulgarian, or Jewish lineage. Only a small percentage said they were "pure Ukrainian" or "pure Russian." Some found this question irrelevant, saying they saw

themselves in terms of territorial belonging, rather than in terms of an ethnic group. A considerable number noted that local identification with a region or city of residence or a pan-ethnic identification with a Slavic or Soviet space previously superseded their ethnic and national identification. It should be noted that previous studies indicated that a local or pan-Slavic identification is complementary with loyalties to Ukraine (Shulman 1998). While my respondents identified with Ukraine to a varying degree before, the outbreak of war, Russia's role in it and the subsequent engagement of my respondents in volunteer work had a profound effect on how many came to think about belonging. Their identification with Ukraine came to supersede other forms of identification. They increasingly identified with Ukraine as a state, with Ukrainian institutions and with Ukrainian culture and language.

The linguistic profile of my interviewees indicated a predominance of Russian speakers in volunteer networks, an unsurprising finding given the dominant position of the Russian language in Eastern and Southern Ukraine. About three quarters of the interviews were conducted in Russian, as I sought to linguistically accommodate respondents. One quarter of interviews (over 20) were conducted in Ukrainian, with respondents noting that they felt equally comfortable speaking Ukrainian and Russian. Only five respondents out of 95 said they exclusively used Ukrainian as their language of everyday use before the Maidan protests.³⁵ As I discovered, wartime engagement impacted the linguistic attitudes and, to a lesser extent, the linguistic practices of my respondents.

³⁵ Bilaniuk and Melnyk (2008) note that people might be over-reporting their competence in Ukrainian in accordance with a previously common ideology that Ukrainians differs little from Russian and it requires little effort to know it. They also point out that claiming to understand a language is not an objective measure, but an objective and ideologically shaped statement with political implications. Self-reported competence in language should not be taken at face value.

To conclude, my data show that mobilization at the rear was driven by individuals who had very little experience with public or political engagement before the Maidan protests and the outbreak of war. Entrepreneurs joined the ranks of volunteers, using their financial and human capital resources to expand the scope of the work, but the flexibility and grassroots nature of volunteering allowed individuals of different socio-economic background to contribute based on their abilities. Volunteer work was driven by gendered solidarities, with men's responsibility seen as joining the military and women's responsibility viewed as assisting and supporting them. Ethno-linguistic factors seemed to be insignificant in the war-driven mobilization with the majority of respondents speaking Russian and identifying with Ukraine to a various degree before the outbreak of war. The success volunteers have had in turning initially sporadic efforts into effective bottom-up initiatives and the trust they now enjoy might indicate the emergence of grassroots communities providing sources of knowledge and power from "below."

Motivations for volunteer engagement

What drives volunteers to invest their time and considerable personal resources, while often placing their lives at risk to help with the war effort? As previously stated, previous studies of volunteer engagement show that there is no "altruistic" personality that can explain the urge of individuals to help others. For this study, the respondents were asked to elaborate on the context within which their initial engagement occurred. They were encouraged to discuss their understanding of the situation at the time and their emotional response to it. Attention was paid to the concrete details of the first instance of volunteering – who was the recipient of help, what kind of assistance was provided, what the relationship was between the recipient and provider of assistance, and whether assistance was provided on someone's request. Naturally, not all respondents were able to recall the moment of initial volunteering with precision. Some gave

generalized accounts of how they felt at the time and why they decided to get engaged; others provided specific details about their first volunteer action and pathways to sustained engagement.³⁶

This section presents a typology of self-reported motives for engagement. For the sake of analytical clarity, I grouped the responses into three distinctive section, but it is important to note that there is no clear demarcation of motives, with some respondents pointing to two or three motives simultaneously. At the same time, the reoccurrence of certain themes made it possible to reconstruct, in a hypothetical form, the motivational structure underlying the volunteer behavior of most of my respondents. The interviews revealed three main reasons for wartime engagement: the participation in Maidan protests, the fear of war spillover to nearby regions and a preoccupation with the precarious situation of combatants and displaced individuals.

“It was a continuation of the same fight”: from Maidan protests to volunteer engagement

As stated in the previous section, one third of volunteers participated in the Maidan protests with a varying degree of commitment. Some of them saw war volunteering as a natural continuation of the protests. Eva, a lead volunteer of Station Kharkiv, is a good example of that. She recalled that the idea to organize an assistance center for IDPs grew out of her engagement in Maidan. When protests erupted in Kyiv and many of Eva’s friends went to the capital to join the

³⁶ Methodologically, asking specific questions on motivation is important to obtain credible responses. As Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) note, volunteers might discover unanticipated gratification performing altruistic acts. This can include social recognition, socializing, the acquisition of political capital and other forms of appreciation. As a result, they can unintentionally revisit and re-evaluate the reasons for engagement in the first place. Consequently, reported motives are likely to reflect “the dictates of social desirability” of volunteer engagement, giving respondents incentives to emphasize, for example, civic-minded reasons for participation over other considerations (Verba et al. 1995: 237). This is especially the case when data collection is delayed from the initial moment of engagement, as it can lead to “memory loss” and reconstructed reasons for engagement (Schwarz and Oyserman 2001). Another methodological difficulty relates to understanding identities as fluid and constantly taking new forms. Individuals do not enter the public arena as fully formed political subjects (Verba et al. 1995). Rather, new experiences transform them into political subjects. Their discourses, actions and motivations at a particular moment are subject to change as events unfold. Self-reported stories of behavior might account for the most immediate, but not necessarily the most pertinent issues. The decomposition of a complex question into several more specific ones and facilitating recall cues yields more reliable and accurate responses (Schwarz and Oyserman 2001).

protesters, she had to stay behind to take care of her hospitalised mother. After Maidaners were severely beaten, Eva and her husband started sending medication to Kyiv, spending hours to find the best deals on affordable medicinal and pharmaceutical supplies, packing them and shipping off to the capital. She reported being concerned for the safety of her friends and anxious about the unfolding of violence on Maidan. Eva decided to sign up for the first medical aid training with Red Cross, becoming a member of their medical squad. After the annexation of Crimea, she was assigned to work at the Emergency Hotline at Red Cross. It was the time when the first IDPs from the peninsula were arriving to mainland Ukraine, disoriented and helpless. Eva's task to deal with incoming calls and transfer requests to designated state agencies became unmanageable, as fighting erupted in the nearby cities of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk. Eva called on her friends and Kharkivites at large to unite and assist the internally displaced. This call led to the creation of "Station Kharkiv" – a volunteer network assisting IDPs. The network continued to grow in the following years with Eva transitioning from protest participation to volunteer work.

Some respondents said their volunteer work growing out of Maidan participation was not always a "conscious decision." Others pointed out that participating in the protest and volunteering were driven by the same considerations – "a fight for Ukraine's better future." As one of my respondents commented, "practically, everyone engaged in volunteering now are people who were active in the Maidan protests. I understand very well that the current war is a continuation of the Maidan Revolution. It's the same fight that we started on Maidan: the fight for our independence." (Dnipropetrovs'k, Fieldwork Interview, 8 August 2015)

Participation in the Maidan protests strengthened the commitment of some protesters to do "whatever it takes" to build a stable and democratic country. The brutality of the regime and the death of fellow protesters was a turning point for many of my respondents, making them more

committed to defend their values and not fall into passivity. Some reported that the overthrow of the Yanukovich regime convinced them that ordinary citizens can influence the fate of a country and helped overcome any hopelessness they felt before the protests. In other words, the Maidan protests played an important role in convincing people that their actions mattered and could have a tangible effect.

Some of those who participated in the Maidan protests became wartime volunteers of their own volition, while others were pulled into participation by requests for help from fellow protesters. One of my respondents reported being approached by her friend, also a Maidaner, with a request to help with the internally displaced. A year later, during my fieldwork, she was still taking care of displaced persons and was one of the main volunteers in Odesa. Another respondent from Odesa mentioned that she started making balaklavas for Maidan. During that time, she had met people who went on to organize a volunteer initiative; they remembered her and asked her for assistance with balaklavas, this time for the front. Similarly, a few other respondents reported being approached with requests for help because of their participation in the protests. As my respondent from Kharkiv noted, he did not “decide” to volunteer. Some acquaintances, knowing about his Maidan engagement, called and asked for help purchasing army boots. This request signaled the beginning of his wartime work providing, fundraising and procuring for the army. To an extent, participation in Maidan was seen as a marker of one’s willingness to assist in one way or another and acted as a pull factor for volunteerism.

More broadly, structures created at Maidan were crucial in recruiting volunteers. For example, the 14th *sotnya*, a defense unit formed in the capital at the time, was later split up. Some participants joined voluntary battalions and went to the front to fight while others stayed behind to assist by obtaining necessary supplies. Similarly, Maidan networks who helped beaten activists

during the protests remained active in Kharkiv afterwards, redirecting their help to those injured on the front. Another example is the Crisis Support Service; it was formed on Maidan with over 50 professional psychologists providing free assistance to beaten activists, their families and the families of those killed during the protests. This network reoriented its assistance to address war needs, expanding its regional outreach. Two of my respondents, professional psychologists, joined the Crisis Support Services after the violence on Donbas to provide professional guidance on dealing with traumatic realities of war. These Maidan networks sustained, expanded and provided leadership for grassroots mobilization at the rear, providing support to combatants and displaced persons alike. The findings of Worschech (2017) resonate with these observations. She contends that many war volunteer initiatives were extensions of the ones that emerged on Maidan, with activists drawing on the organisational innovations, expertise and connections established during the protests.³⁷ This is especially the case regarding army-support initiatives that grew out of Maidan engagement.

The Maidan protests also provided space for strengthening inter-regional ties and building trustworthy relations that became important for volunteering. Most of the protesters were from Western and Central Ukraine, with only a small percentage of participants from Eastern and Southern regions.³⁸ Those who did travel to Kyiv to join the protests had an opportunity to meet and establish connections with people from other regions. Recalling her life at Maidan, Alena, a volunteer from Kharkiv said: “I met tons of people from Western and Central Ukraine, from Odesa too. We stayed at my friend’s place. She sheltered another six people at her rented apartment. We

³⁷ Particularly, Worschech (2017) notes that the first *SOS* organisation was *Euromaidan SOS* established to provide beaten students with legal advice and assistance. Later, *Vostok SOS*, *Crimea SOS* and other initiatives drew on that experience to respond to displacement and human rights violations in the context of Donbas war.

³⁸ According to the survey conducted by Onuch (2014), 42 percent of the Maidan protesters were from cities other than Kyiv. Out of that percentage, most protesters came from Western and Central oblasts, with only one fifth coming from Eastern or Southern oblasts (Onuch 2014:48).

slept like sardines in a tin – people from Dnipropetrovs’k, Odesa, Kharkiv, Kyiv and L’viv. We didn’t know each other before, but we stayed in touch after the Maidan protests.” Other volunteers who supported the Maidan protest agreed that the protests in Kyiv played an important role in inter-regional socializing; protesters met and engaged in a discussion of the protests and other aspects of political and social life in Ukraine. “Now everyone is connected in one way or another, everyone knows people from Kyiv, Odesa, L’viv. Everything got mixed up in the country, consolidating it and uniting people,” remarked a volunteer from Kharkiv. In addition to inter-regional socializing, the Maidan protests provided space for the emergence of “trust networks” that allowed for the transmission of social and human capital to the war situation (Worschech 2017). This increased the outreach and effectiveness of wartime mobilization.

My fieldwork data indicate the proceeding Maidan protests played a crucial role in the subsequent war mobilization. For some protesters, war engagement was an obvious choice to continue their fight for the better prospects of Ukraine. Others joined volunteer networks on the request of fellow activists. Maidan networks, thus, provided an important recruitment infrastructure for the subsequent collective action at the rear. The significance of the Maidan protests expands beyond that as the protests provided space for inter-regional socializing and building of trust, something that increased the effectiveness of wartime initiatives. Finally, the Maidan protests provided a venue where organisational innovation could take root, allowing wartime volunteers to adopt “templates” of successful initiatives and expand them to war realities. Proceeding protests, one can conclude, played a pivotal role in the success of war-driven collective action at the rear.

“The war was knocking at our door”: fear and anxiety in initiating engagement

The second large group consisted of people who were not active in the Maidan protests, but mobilized because of the looming uncertainty and the fear of war spilling over to their home cities. The reported reasons for anxiety included the physical proximity of Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Odesa to the war zone, the closeness of the cities to borders with Russia, and the narratives of “re-establishing Novorossiia.” Recalling the instability of that time, one of my respondents commented: “There was unverified information circling that Dnipropetrovsk could be invaded within days. The priority at that time was not to let it become part of Novorossiia.”

The respondents in this category reported that they saw the annexation of Crimea as the first step of external aggression and were worried that their cities might be next. A few said they felt the war was “at the door.” Some experienced distress observing the unfolding violence and hostilities and noting the signs of war in their cities. They remarked that an increasing circulation of emergency vehicles and helicopters bringing those injured on the front was disturbing and difficult to ignore. This category of volunteers stressed the volatility of the situation coupled with their anxiety that violence could easily engulf their peaceful lives. The following comments are illustrative:

People were killed on the streets of our city, cars were set on fire. We witnessed it firsthand and we understood perfectly well that war could break out here too. In fact, war did break out here, but lasted only a few hours. (Kharkiv, Fieldwork, 11 June 2015)

When somebody asks me why I help the front, I respond that I am scared that it would start here. I try to contribute to the best of my ability to constrain the war and not let it spread. I am truly scared for my children. I am not an oligarch and I can't leave Ukraine and wait it out. (Dnipropetrovsk, Fieldwork, 8 August 2015)

Some of my respondents noted that when thinking about the violence on Donbas, they imagined themselves in the position of the internally displaced or those hiding in the basement

from shelling. Others imagined the targeting of their families for participating in the Maidan protests or children hiding in the bomb shelters. These worries propelled their engagement. This group of volunteers tended to focus on their emotional state at the start of volunteering and their distress at that time.

The fear of war in these cities was so palpable that some respondents were prepared to join the underground resistance in the event of external aggression and discussed this possibility with others. Stocking up on sand bags, getting basic military and medical training and repairing trench shelters in the cities were among the preparations of volunteers in the spring – summer of 2014. Some made a commitment to defend the city “if the war comes” and even established an undercover meeting point in case of external aggression.

Volunteering became one of the ways individuals dealt with a heightened sense of insecurity and worked to prepare for “the worst-case scenario” of military aggression. Preventive actions included the territorial defense of a relatively peaceful frontline. In Dnipropetrovs’k, for example, volunteers set up headquarters in the regional state administration to prevent the violence from reaching their city:

The headquarters were not just a civilian organization. It was a military-patriotic formation. We were divided into squads (*sotnyas*), underwent a military training – some of us for the first time. It was a territorial defense unit of Dnipropetrovs’k. We created over 50 checkpoints to prevent separatism from spreading. We joined together with the police force for patrols. The separatist views were common in the police and it was hard to cooperate with them. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs’k, 22 August 2015)

Aiding combatants was another way of “constraining the war elsewhere” and not allowing it to engulf their homes. Helping the military exposed them to some of the problems and needs of soldiers and volunteer fighters. They referenced the importance of “seeing it” with their

own eyes – the hardships and destitution in the army – and “personally hearing” the stories of combatants about the lack of supplies and state support.

Some said they sought trips to the front or approached combatants on the streets or in the hospitals to get a better grasp of the situation. Overwhelmed by distress and disoriented by rumors and conflicting news, these face-to-face interactions and personal encounters with the war realities helped my respondents understand the situation. They came to believe that the country was at war. Recalling her first trip to the front, one of my respondents noted:

Honestly, I couldn't believe that there was a war in Eastern Ukraine. It was like an alternative reality for me and I was afraid of getting immersed in it. I had to see it with my own eyes to believe it. Many people, relaying information, distort it through their prism of interpretation, impressions and perceptions. I had to understand the real state of affairs for myself. I don't like relying on someone else's accounts because they are often too emotional and sensational. In Mariupol, I talked to soldiers who survived a severe shelling the night before and I realized the seriousness of the situation. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 12 July 2015)

Another volunteer went to the hospital to get a better sense of the situation on Donbas and make up her own mind about voluntary battalion fighters on the pro-Ukraine side. There was a lot of propaganda and confusion about the war and she didn't trust media outlets or Facebook:

I wanted to see it personally and form my own opinion. I don't have a TV and haven't watched it for three years. In this particular case, I trusted neither Facebook nor other media outlets. That's why I decided to personally talk to the guys at the hospital and see whether they are fascists or not. I was intentionally looking out for Pravyi Sector fighters to talk to them and soldiers too to have a better understanding of who these people are. And when I realized that they are kind and great boys, I made up my mind and now nobody can convince me otherwise, including media outlets. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs'k, 12 August 2015)

One volunteer, a former soldier in the Soviet Army, went to a military training ground near Odesa to personally inquire into the situation with military mobilization. He was shocked by the lack of basic equipment, the substandard training of conscripts and other realities of the Ukrainian forces.

As these vignettes suggest, conflicting messages about unfolding events and a lack of credible sources impelled many respondents to seek information firsthand. For this category of respondents, volunteering became a coping mechanism to overcome a sense of despair and helplessness. They sought opportunities for engagement, either joining territorial defense units in their respective cities or seeking to assist those on the frontlines. A mix of confusion and anxiety propelled them to inquire about combatants and their situation, leading to sustained engagement. Exposing themselves to war realities, they developed a sense of solidarity with and attachment to those they sought to help, strengthening their commitment to volunteering.

“My heart was breaking”: identification with the precarity of combatants and displaced persons

The third motive for engagement had to do with affective reactions to the needs of war-affected civilians and soldiers and identification with these groups. Affective focus on the fate of other people became a stimulus for action to protect and help those in need. Individuals to whom this motive applies tended to focus on the needs, situation and emotional states of those they helped. As war produced dispossession and suffering on a large scale, some responded to the vulnerability of others by donating their resources, time and energy to aid them.

Some volunteers told me that their ability to relate to displaced persons was a triggering factor in engagement. In some instances, common motherhood fostered this identification. Yulia, a 30-year old volunteer, said she felt compassion and empathy towards mothers who had to flee their home towns. When the first IDPs started arriving in Kharkiv, Yulia, a marketing director, was on maternity leave, taking care of her daughter. This is how she talked about relating to and taking the perspective of internally displaced mothers:

I imagined a situation when I can't stay at my home anymore and have to flee with my baby to a place where I have neither relatives nor acquaintances. I have no savings and the likelihood is high that I didn't bring documents with myself.

All I can carry is my child, a cellphone and some food that would feed us for a day. Where would I go? Where? (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 12 June 2015)

Other interviewees also reported their experiences of motherhood as the basis for empathy. Like Yulia, Alla was a stay-at-home mother of three children when the war on Donbas broke out. Recalling her first act of assistance to injured soldiers arriving in Kharkiv, she said:

I didn't know personally anyone hospitalised. I came across a post in Facebook about injured soldiers with their names and dates of birth. I saw that some soldiers were the same age as my older daughter, born in the same year. My heart was breaking to think that someone's children are in great pain. The post said that wounded soldiers needed shoes and underwear. Once you are on the surgery table, your cloth is removed and they had nothing to put back on. (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 8 June 2015)

Alla collected some clothing she had from her past entrepreneurship and donated it to the hospital. She decided to bring the remaining items to IDPs, calling on her social circle to help out as well. Together with her husband, she went to "Romashka," a previously state-owned recreational center purchased by local businessmen and turned into a shelter for IDPs. Alla recalls that the first encounter with IDPs was eye-opening and shocking:

When you come to the shelter for the first time and see a child, completely devastated and shocked by the horrific experiences of fleeing home and leaving everything behind... and he tells you about thugs and stuff... and how Ukrainian flags were taken down in his town... I am used to stories like this one now, but back then it was utterly shocking for me. (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 8 June 2015)

Like many other volunteers, Alla didn't think volunteering would become something permanent for her and her family. Through "Romashka," she learned about the "Station Kharkiv" initiative and responded to the call for help, as volunteers struggled to cope with the increasing flow of people fleeing violence. Recalling her first visit to the train station, Alla said:

When I was going to the train station, I thought it would be a one-time thing, because I saw that my children and my family were lacking attention and emotionally I found volunteering challenging. But when I got to the train station, I realized that the true challenge laid ahead. What we saw and heard was horrifying. It was a nightmare. During the first day of my shift at the *vokzal* (train

station), the first mother I happened to talk to told me a terrifying story of their evacuation, saying that their bus, full of mothers with children, elderly and disabled people was an inch away from being shelled. All passengers were praying in their bus to stay alive and not to be killed by the rebels. (Kharkiv, Fieldwork, 8 June 2015)

These accounts of initial volunteer engagement exemplify how ideals of “motherhood” triggered compassion and then action. Throughout the interview, Alla kept recalling experiences of single mothers arriving with their children at the train station, with nowhere to go and nobody to rely on. The emphasis on motherhood is important, because it vividly shows that “the private/public” divide is not fixed and can be easily transgressed in certain instances, like war. Many female volunteers extended the sense of motherhood beyond their families to provide care to injured soldiers seen as “imagined children” or displaced women seen as an “imagined self,” and they explained their willingness to help using gender-charged language.

Perspective-taking was not limited to motherhood and often focused on the precarity of IDPs and combatants more broadly. My respondents confided that they often ignored the political views of displaced persons, some of whom were critical of the Ukrainian state, because of their vulnerability and destitution. One volunteer remarked:

These were, first and for most, people who lost their houses; their habitual ways of life got disrupted by the war. They lost everything. It was easy to turn tables and imagine myself in this situation. It’s terrifying! I saw that politically they were of diverse convictions and I heard them talk about politics, but I did not care about it at all. I saw them as people who were in a tragic state and needed help. I understood that I and my family could end up in the same situation, God forbid. We were an inch away from this disaster in Odesa. Knowing that I could be in their shoes and that the war could break out in our city too made me completely indifferent to their political views and focused on helping them instead. (Odesa, Fieldwork, 12 July 2015)

Testimonies like this one suggest a correlation between precarity and mobilization. The high number of displaced persons in the regions bordering the war zone created “pockets of precarity” to which ordinary residents felt compelled to respond. Similarly, a high number of

injured soldiers noted the profound vulnerability of those sent to the front and returning with wounds or disabilities. The theme of precarity featured strongly in their accounts of initial engagement, pointing to its mobilizing potential. The sense of precarity was intensified by the state's apparent incapacity to address the most vulnerable individuals, leaving them in protracted crisis. In these cases, some respondents felt it was a moral imperative to respond to the needs of others.

The initial reaction to the needs of others often exposed individuals to the scope of war-generated needs, giving them better insight into the situation and strengthening their commitment to help others. This suggests developmental dynamics at play. In fact, many reported that their initial engagement was situational and case-specific, but with time, this sporadic assistance grew into long-term sustainable engagement, with volunteers diversifying their work and developing a nuanced understanding of it. Put otherwise, their volunteering was inseparably connected to their meaning-making of it. While situational and sporadic engagement could happen without a thorough justification, it seemed that sustaining their volunteer engagement required respondents to articulate and explain the meaning of their work to themselves and others. They drew on the intensive socialization in volunteer networks and their interactions with combatants and IDPs to inject meaning into their practices.

As this section demonstrates, voluntary engagement was mostly spurred by local concerns about security and the needs of war-affected populations rather than patriotism. While master cleavages and a sense of allegiance to the state might inform and motivate individuals to a certain degree, their actions are primarily driven by local considerations and dynamics of violence. "The pockets of precarity" that emerged in the cities bordering the war zone and the alarming sense of insecurity propelled many to engage in volunteer work. It is plausible to assume that volunteer

efforts in Western Ukraine were driven by concerns that differed from the ones expressed by the residents of Eastern and Southern Ukraine. Our knowledge about the regional dynamics of wartime mobilization is rather limited at this stage. My fieldwork concentrated on Eastern and Southern Ukraine and its findings cannot be generalised across the country without compromising rigour and nuance of local dynamics and considerations.

Pathways to volunteer work

Admittedly, the Maidan protests provided an infrastructure for the subsequent war mobilization, but it was only one of the ways individuals got engaged. Two thirds of my respondents did not support or participate in the Maidan uprisings, but got active afterwards. This raises the question of how these individuals got started and what factors propelled them into action. My fieldwork data indicate that two other types of networks were instrumental in facilitating collective action at the rear. This includes social and entrepreneurial networks, which I discuss in this section.

Social and professional networks in volunteering

In my interviews, I discovered that social networks were the basis for a great deal of the war mobilization at the rear. The joiners generally knew someone who was directly impacted by the consequences of war or who was conscripted into the military. For example, Ivan, a demobilized soldier, said when he was conscripted, his university friend, not a very close one, became his “personal volunteer.” He was the first person who responded to Ivan’s conscription offering help and he assisted Ivan throughout his military service. Another volunteer from Dnipropetrovs’k got a text from a friend with information about injured soldiers transported to the city hospital and the lack of medication. She forwarded the text to all her contacts, managing to fundraise 70,000 UAH (approximately 3,000 USD) within the first 10 hours. The success of the

initial fundraising made her optimistic about her capacity to help, encouraging to remain active. A year later, my respondent, now one of the lead volunteers in Dnipropetrovs'k, joined the city administration to help combatants in a more systematic way. Another volunteer from Odesa recalled that her volunteering started with her co-worker being conscripted. When she called him to inquire about his military service, "his voice sounded very sad," she said. To support him, she decided to send him a parcel. This parcel became the first step in her long-term volunteering for the army.

There were many other examples: individuals contacted their university classmates, school friends, or former and present colleagues to maximize the scope of their assistance. Calling on one's social contacts had diverse outcomes; some engaged personally in volunteering; others responded by donating money or resources. Commenting on the dynamics of volunteer mobilization, one of my respondents compared it to multi-level marketing where people relied on the "bring your friend in" scheme to collect funds and find needed supplies. The social capital of lead volunteers was crucial in engaging more people in volunteer efforts, albeit with a varying degree of commitment. The network "Monster Corporation," a charity organization assisting IDPs in Odesa, for example, was formed of university friends of its lead volunteer – Kateryna Nozhevnikova. When displaced children from orphanages arrived in Odesa, Kateryna created a Facebook group inviting her Facebook friends to help. The initial call for assistance laid the foundation for long-term assistance to displaced persons in Odesa, with "Monster Corporation" becoming the main IDP-oriented network in the city.

Interestingly, very few of my respondents and none of the lead volunteers had family members directly impacted by war – either through military conscription or displacement. Out of 95 respondents, only two female volunteers had husbands serving in the war zone and neither

referenced her husband's service as a reason for engagement. In fact, they got involved with the war effort before their husbands joined the military and remained active throughout their service. Another female respondent reported that she became preoccupied with locating missing soldiers after her son went missing on the front. But these were isolated cases. Most people I interviewed had someone from their close or distant social or professional, not familial, circle impacted by war. Others didn't have any acquaintances at all.

Undoubtedly, some family members were involved. Across Ukraine committees of mothers, wives and sisters formed to support soldiers and their families, help them get through traumatic experiences, and advocate for their rights. My fieldwork interviews and observations, however, indicated that these committees represented a small fraction of the volunteer networks mushrooming in Ukraine. As some of my respondents explained, family members of soldiers helped their sons and husbands directly, purchasing clothing and transferring money to them. Many were unable to help on a larger scale, it was noted, because they faced increased financial, domestic, and emotional burdens associated with war and military conscription. These burdens often constrained their ability to help in a more sustainable and consistent manner outside familial preoccupations. The report produced by the Center of Civic Initiatives documents some of the challenges faced by family members of those conscripted in the military and confronted by war realities (Zarady Imeni 2015).

These accounts suggest strong social ties underpinning the formation of voluntary networks, injecting public concerns into private ties. Some scholars consider strong private ties as inimical to broader engagement. Howard (2002a), for example, attributes the weakness of civil society in post-communist states to the persistence of friendship networks. He argues that "in postcommunist societies, many people are still invested in their own private circles and simply

feel no need, much less desire, to join and participate in civil society organizations” (2002: 163). Gibson (2001) echoes this point, claiming that societies with strong but closed social networks are “un-civil” and inhibit collective action. He argues that these circles tend to be homogenous and preclude interaction with those outside them. As a result, strong social networks cause the atomization of small groups, making them publicly and politically irrelevant. In contrast, weak ties enable interactions between diverse groups, something helpful for developing a sense of communal good and an appreciation of democratic norms (Gibson 2001).

Given the importance of social and professional networks to the Ukrainian volunteers I spoke to, it seems plausible to suggest that under dire circumstances, strong private connections can drive mobilization. People draw on them to address broader concerns and needs. Understanding how individuals are bound in networks of relations might explain the potential for mobilization better than broader indicators of associational life. Relations formed throughout the life course - school, university, work, childrearing, etc. - have the potential to be transformed into a social infrastructure for collective action and broader engagement. My findings also attest to the fluidity of “public/private” divide under heightened precarity.

Entrepreneurial networks in volunteering

Entrepreneurial networks had special significance in the grassroots volunteer mobilization. Entrepreneurial connections, practices and skills shored up volunteering and shaped its dynamics in numerous ways. My data provide evidence that entrepreneurs used their business contacts, suppliers and customers for a range of activities related to volunteering. Entrepreneurial networks offered an infrastructure, providing knowledge and information relevant to volunteering, including managerial skills, coordination, and large-scale procurements. This section takes a closer

look at the ways entrepreneurial networks and skills increased the efficiency and scope of volunteering.

The entrepreneurs I interviewed referred to their “financial sustainability” as a factor driving their intense engagement. Some noted that they initially drew on personal resources to provide assistance. Large scale procurements to address the war needs meant considerable costs. In this sense, entrepreneurs referred to their financial ability to “afford volunteering.” Iryna, an entrepreneur from Dnipropetrovs’k, put it this way:

I have been in business for over 20 years now. I am quite successful financially. In a sense, I can afford volunteering. From May 2014 onward, after the war started, my main task was to supply water to the front. They call me “Water Queen.” I had a financial ability to buy and deliver water to the war zone. I was doing it out of my personal resources. (Dnipropetrovs’k, Fieldwork, 12 August 2015)

Indeed, in the first months of volunteering Iryna managed to organize a water supply chain to bring drinking water to the front in significant quantities. Using personal resources worked to build credibility and trustworthiness, allowing to engage more people and resources. Iryna referenced her business-like approach to volunteering as something that enabled her to assist efficiently. Responding to the first request for water, for example, she used her entrepreneurial skills and networks to deliver 20 tons of water to the Dnipropetrovs’k airport which accepted injured soldiers:

I am a business person. I started counting. I can borrow a tailor truck from my friends free of charge, but its capacity is 20 tons. It makes no sense to bring 20 litres of water in a 20-ton truck. We need to get a good price to deliver 20 tons of water. I used business connections, contacted some of the people, a plant that can give us a good price. And we arranged everything. 20 tons of water. You should have seen the faces of the airport employees when they saw a 20-ton truck full of water! Nobody supplied that much before! Previously, they got 2 or 3 tons of water at most. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs’k, 22 August 2015)

As this statement illustrates, Iryna retained and made use of her entrepreneurial identity while conducting volunteer work. Being able to see a process in its entirety, doing research and strategic thinking about the immense war needs, and using connections to execute a plan in the most cost-effective way were skills Iryna acquired in business and applied in volunteering. She noted that “doing the work” is not always the most important part. She referenced the camouflage-knitting female volunteers working under her supervision to illustrate the point. According to her, they knew how to knit, but had no experience with organizing assistance – prioritizing sites of delivery, researching how to use the nets on military vehicles, and consulting the military, ensuring that the nets didn’t get into the hands of enemies. These tasks required managerial skills that many of my respondents had acquired in business. My respondents also said you need to have good management, leadership and accounting skills to engage in volunteering in a sustainable fashion. This requires setting goals and brainstorming about the ways to reach them. Without organizational and management skills, one noted, “All you can do is to collect canned food by the supermarkets – that’s the limit of it.”

Managerial and organizational skills were so important in volunteering that some of my respondents referred to themselves as managers, not volunteers:

I always say that we are managers, we are carriers. On one hand, we are speakers, we voice the problems existent in the army. On the other hand, we deliver to the front the donations of other people. We inform people on the needs and they donate money to address them. That’s not our money. We just manage it. (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 7 July 2015)

The rhetoric of entrepreneurship borrowed from the business world was very visible in volunteer work. Many of my respondents talked about efficiency and cost cutting as essential elements of their work. Various cost-minimizing practices were referenced to illustrate how they dealt with the mounting demands of war. Some of them stressed that their goal was to strike the

best balance between quality and price. These discourses were also linked to transparency and accountability, seen as core values in sustaining fundraising efforts and maintaining the trust of others.

As Iryna's case indicates, entrepreneurs used their entrepreneurial networks for war needs. A few reported that they were able to collect large amounts of money for emergency needs in a short period of time through their business contacts. The trust established in entrepreneurial networks prior to war was key to fast and effective fundraising. One respondent, an entrepreneur from Odesa, commented on her use of business contacts for volunteering in the following way:

I go to my friends, business partners, former clients, sponsors to collect enough money [for big purchases]. Most donations come from "ordinary people." Big donors help in cases, when we have a list of needs for thousands of hryvnias, for 100,000 hryvnias or a million. I send them specific requests and they buy it personally. They ask me where to get the best price. Then, they deliver the items to our office and we bring everything to the front. But this is mostly for big amounts of money, 200,000 or 300,000 or a million. (Odesa, Fieldwork, 22 July 2015)

Contacting suppliers, customers, creditors and retailers and using indirect ties in linking distant individuals for war needs or seeking necessary resources ensured the efficiency of volunteer work.

Business ties were also used for a wide range of informal practices, such as getting discounts, procuring for the army at self-cost, or finding people willing to provide services free of charge. One of my respondents, an entrepreneur previously doing business at the *7th Kilometer*, the biggest open market in Odesa, reported establishing contact with many retailers at the market and locating the best prices and good quality products for the military. She did not belong to any particular volunteer network, assisting mainly through her contacts and skills.

In Kharkiv, another respondent, an entrepreneur in the IT business, made an arrangement with his business partners to use their fitness center facilities as drop off locations for

donations. Dalia, the lead volunteer from the Odesa kitchen battalion, noted that their large-scale cooking for the army was made possible thanks to the generosity of restaurant owners, who gave access to their restaurant premises for volunteering purposes. Entrepreneurs actively drew on their connections in the business sector to enhance their volunteer efforts. Other volunteers established partnerships with various entrepreneurs. Through these partnerships, they tapped into the entrepreneurial resources, increasing the outreach of their work. The success of these arrangements relied on the hyper-flexibility of personalized entrepreneurial networks that were reoriented, at least partially, toward war needs.

The hyper-flexibility of entrepreneurs even allowed some to pay salaries to the employees engaged in volunteering and support them financially during the intensive months of war engagement. Valik, an activist from Maidan, said that he could not combine full-time work with volunteering because of its intense emotional and physical demands, but his boss decided to pay him a salary as his contribution to the war effort:

If I had no income, I wouldn't be able to do volunteer work. I would have to earn a living to feed myself. My boss understands that. He is a businessman. Like many other businessmen, he is risk averse. He doesn't want to go and deliver supplies to the front himself, but he is willing to help financially and procure for the army. He is too scared to risk his life, but he is ready to help in other ways, giving me a sustenance, for example. (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 14 June 2015)

A few other volunteers shared similar stories: their employers, often entrepreneurs, enabled them to volunteer by releasing them from professional duties while supporting them financially. Some volunteers even reported that entrepreneurs covered the costs of personal body guards in times when volunteering was dangerous and put them at high risk.

The hyper-flexibility of entrepreneurship in Ukraine that allowed some to discharge resources and labour for war needs was possible because of the informality engendered by the

economic transition of the 1990s. One of my respondents, a lawyer engaged in volunteer work, noted that both small and medium business owners were forced to operate on the edge of legality in Ukraine, often sliding outside of what was permissible to make a profit and stay afloat. The taxation system, specific regulations of entrepreneurial activities, and the investment climate made entrepreneurial activities difficult to conduct and encouraged entrepreneurs to engage in informal practices to ensure the sustainability of their business. This often meant establishing ties with bureaucrats at the local and national levels to ensure the survival and profitability of business. The informality and flexibility of entrepreneurial networks in Ukraine has been documented by a number of scholars (Polese 2013; Smallbone and Welter 2001; Williams 2008; Round et al. 2008), who noted that informal arrangements were the key to survival for many entrepreneurs.

All of this had special value for volunteer work, because “entrepreneurs-turned-volunteers” could solve bureaucratic issues and cut through red tape to speed up the pace of volunteer assistance – informally, if not illegally. Importing items for the front, for example, could not always be done following formal (legal) procedures. High custom duty payments and slow bureaucratic handling of imported products were cited as barriers to bringing much-needed supplies for the army. Entrepreneurial volunteers often worked to reduce custom duty payments, calling on their contacts with bureaucrats or relying on informal arrangements. Commenting on the ways she procured items for the army, one of my respondents said she deployed her personal contact with the Head of the Customs in Ukraine:

This was a personal initiative, it wasn't legal. We wanted to legalize the process, but it would need to pass through the Parliament... If our order goes through the customs in Odesa, it's easier. Everyone knows me in Odesa. I don't have to pay anything. If our order goes through the customs in Western Ukraine, I can't say that we bribe a lot, but we spend some money to get it through. We pay about 10-20 percent from the value of the item. This is peanuts, to be honest. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 24 July 2015)

Similarly, the embeddedness of entrepreneurs in local bureaucracies helped them solve everyday issues of combatants and IDPs in service provision or integration in new cities of residence. The informality embedded in entrepreneurial activities allowed fast decision making and rapid execution of tasks outside formal channels.

The work of the entrepreneurs in volunteering exposes the blurred boundaries between economic, public and private spheres. Entrepreneurs used their business networks and resources to act as “citizens” concerned with the well-being of their country and fellow citizens. As entrepreneurship in Ukraine is diverse, flexible and well-embedded in local and national bureaucracies, entrepreneurial volunteers were able to draw on a multitude of resources to aid combatants and displaced individuals. Their skills and networks were crucial to the success of the wartime efforts.

Not all volunteers were embedded in entrepreneurial, social or Maidan networks. Some mentioned that they felt isolated and did not know how to help. Respondents from this category learnt about volunteering mainly through media and joined volunteer communities thanks to publicly available information. Television, Facebook and newspapers were crucial in recruiting new people with diverse social and economic backgrounds. Fundraising booths set up by volunteers at supermarkets and informational posters put up in the cities were also useful, attracting more people and expanding the scope of volunteering. While the leadership of volunteer network mainly comprised Maidan protesters and entrepreneurs, ordinary citizens with diverse backgrounds joined in, ensuring a wide-reaching scope of assistance.

In discussing the motives and pathways for engagement, it is important to note that internally displaced persons also actively assisted the army and other displaced. Some joined out of gratitude for assistance received from others. For most of my IDP respondents, however,

volunteering was a means for social integration and starting life anew - building social and professional networks at a new place of residence and meeting like-minded people. Most found themselves socially isolated after moving to new cities and cutting ties with relatives and friends who espoused pro-Russian views. They reported that joining a volunteer community was emotionally fulfilling. One said: “There are people of similar spirits here; people who support Ukraine, just like I do. It was a great relief for me to meet them! The year I had was a complete nightmare and it lifted me up.” This comment sums up these views of my displaced respondents. For many, volunteering was a coping mechanism, allowing them to counter the feeling of helplessness and loss generated by displacement and trauma – it uplifted them and gave hope and comfort so they could get on with their lives.

Conclusion

This chapter analyzed the micro-dynamics of civilian grassroots at the rear that unfolded amidst Donbas war. It looked at the demographic profile of volunteers, their reasons for engagement and pathways to volunteer networks. I relied on 95 interviews with war volunteers to construct an account who got engaged, why and how. My data suggests that most volunteers had very limited experience of public engagement prior to war, with individuals being primarily focused on personal and familial wellbeing. They pointed to heightened fears and increased precarity in the regions bordering the warzone as driving them to join the ranks of volunteers. My respondents feared the war would spread to their own peaceful cities, affecting their lives. To prevent this possibility, they sought opportunities to help those on the front to contain the violence and keep it away from home. Many felt their lives depended on combatants being able to conduct their military duty, and this sense of profound dependency pushed them into actively assisting the army. For this category of respondents, volunteering was a coping mechanism; they dealt with

uncertainty by taking concrete steps to contain war. Affective attachment to combatants grew in the midst of engagement with many commenting on their precarity and vulnerability given state's lacking support. This finding suggests that the dynamics of civilian engagement at the rear should be analyzed in conjunction with the dynamics of violence as heightened security fears can translate into collective action with people seeking opportunities to get engaged.

Identification with the precarity of others led some to donate their time and effort. Those exposed to the dispossession and the losses of the internally displaced and those who saw firsthand the injuries of the wounded felt compelled to assist. Many developed bonds with those in precarity, strengthening their commitment to sustained engagement. The ambiguity of war and the generally social indifference to the disruptions in normal life experienced by displaced persons and combatants reified this commitment. For this category of respondents, volunteering was a way to mitigate the costs of war, however slightly. The uneven allocation of precarity increased the space for engagement. My respondents realized that they could address war needs only collectively, and they sought help from their friends and acquaintances. Centration on the fate of others and affective response to their destitution can foster wartime engagement in communities that are seemingly disengaged under peaceful circumstances.

Looking at pathways to engagement and the importance of social networks in rearward mobilization, the chapter also suggests that the potential for collective action is always nascent and present, even in seemingly passive communities. Our lives are "embedded" in a multitude of networks, and these ties have a tacit capacity to inspire mobilization in dire circumstances. Social and professional networks can become important pathways to broader engagement, as the accounts of my respondents demonstrate. In societies where informal practices are prevalent and private ties are strong, looking at support systems might be a better indication of mobilization potential. As

war fractures many lives and causes mass dispossession, these support systems become essential in effectively addressing the humanitarian costs of warfare. These findings suggest that the vibrancy of associational life and the abundance of pre-existing formal networks might poorly indicate the potential for mobilization in the face of crisis. It makes sense to look at social and professional networks of support to measure the potential for mobilization. Under dire circumstances, strong private ties, believed to be inimical to broader engagement, can facilitate mass mobilization as people draw on trust imbued in private networks to address public concerns.

The insights of this chapter also indicate that empirically there is no clear “the public/private” divide when it comes to engagement under extremities. In Ukraine, entrepreneurial networks acted as a social infrastructure, as entrepreneurs brought with them their practical knowledge of resource management, procurement, efficiency and contacts to expand the rearward collective action. In volunteer initiatives, entrepreneurs acted as “citizens” caring for the wellbeing of others and using their entrepreneurial capital to expand assistance. Similarly, individuals can draw on intimate experiences of motherhood to facilitate care for larger groups, relating to the vulnerability and precarity of others through gender-charged imaginings. New structures of feelings arise when “affect” – a feeling of empathy or compassion – is attached to the bodies of those in need, propelling some to action. In these instances, individuals draw on seemingly private feelings to get engaged in public and community affairs.

Chapter 5. Reordering of gender identities amidst war: “Men became men and women became women”

“We are just singing for the boys on the battlefield,” said Ksenia, a 24-year-old musician, in response to my question about her volunteer work to support the Ukrainian army amidst the war on Donbas. She is one of three women from Dnipropetrovs’k, in Central Eastern Ukraine, who are touring the frontlines with concerts, theatrical performances and cooking workshops. She says she is making pierogies, cheese pancakes and other home-style food with soldiers and singing until her “voice feels strained and [she has] no energy left” to create “homelike coziness” for men in the midst of a stressful wartime environment. Through their efforts, these female volunteers want to show their “gratitude for protection and military service” as well as “boost the morale of the soldiers” who are separated from their families and deprived of comfort and safety. They have come to see their work as essential to the successful functioning of the military, as it contributes to “the building of a team spirit,” shows the importance of military service for society at large, and creates “an incredible synergy” between soldiers and volunteers, predominantly female civilians helping the army.

Dalia, a female volunteer from Odesa, Southern Ukraine, also became engaged in efforts to provide for the army. In the summer of 2014, she created a network that would later become “a kitchen battalion,” with women getting together daily to cook food and send it to the front. They later diversified the range of assistance, fundraising for everyday necessities, such as cigarettes, coffee, underwear, hygiene products and other items associated with domestic comfort. A great deal of thought and effort was invested in every aspect of the work, including packing and shipping. Along with garments and food, each box contained a hand-written message with the contact information of volunteers, and notes of gratitude for the soldiers’ military service. This

was done to ensure they felt support coming from “home.” It also intended to increase the outreach of the network by encouraging soldiers and volunteer battalion fighters to get in touch with volunteers, if they needed a word of support or any supplies.

The stories of Ksenia and Dalia, especially their resourcefulness in helping the war effort, are far from unique. In fact, the opposite is true – they are representative of the volunteer effort gaining sway amidst violence on Donbas. During my summer 2015 fieldwork in Kharkiv, Odesa and Dnipropetrovs’k, cities close to the warzone, I interviewed 95 volunteers to learn more about their engagement, aspirations and practical tasks and study how their engagement and preoccupations influenced their understanding of the self in relation to community, nation and the state. Two thirds of them were women, a number indicative of the asymmetrical gender patterns of the larger war mobilization. Many responded to the call for military mobilization by volunteering their time, efforts and material resources. They addressed new traumatic realities of war, assisting the army, helping the wounded and working with internally displaced persons. Most of the volunteer networks mushrooming in the wake of the war on Donbas are predominantly female spaces, with women doing the bulk of the work.

The high representation of women in voluntary networks points to the gendered nature of the war-driven grassroots mobilization in Ukraine. I contend that this is the case because a culturally and historically available repertoire of gender norms in Ukraine posited that armed warfare is an extension of the male role, with women relegated to a supporting position of men’s protectoress. Military mobilization amidst the Donbas war drew on this gendered understanding of responsibilities calling on men to take up the arms and defend the country. Considering the range and scope of the needs created by mass military mobilization and limited state capacity to assist combatants, women got together to provide for soldiers and volunteer fighters. Their

supporting functions include myriad tasks, ranging from supplying food to procuring combat-related equipment and delivering both to the front. In addition, women became involved in emotional labour, providing moral support and encouragement to those on the front, an extension of their preconceived female ability to deal with the psychological implications of war. Ethnographic evidence suggests that the need for emotional support was amplified by the poor psychological preparedness of combatants for warfare, the arduous conditions of military service, and the ambiguity of war with some questioning the status of combatants as “heroes.” To address these issues, female volunteers invested considerable time and energies to affectively attend to the needs of combatants, express gratitude for their military service and create “homelike” environment on the front and away.

I show that wartime volunteering has provided the space to reconfigure the gender identities of volunteers and combatants towards more traditional and essentialist interpretations, thereby establishing the hegemony of “militarized masculinity” and “caregiver femininity” in volunteer communities. This is evident in discursive conceptualizations of gender identities, practical preoccupations of volunteers, their material and emotional practices as well as shifting registers of behavior. The reordering of gender identities amidst war has had contradictory effects on women’s status in society. On the one hand, it has resulted in their higher visibility in social and political life, giving them opportunities to go beyond the limits of traditional roles. Through volunteering, women have acquired new skills, taken on new responsibilities and increased their socio-political awareness as citizens. On the other hand, it has limited their social and political engagement to support and care, spheres traditionally seen as the responsibility of women, with the status of men remaining that of the main decision makers. I discuss the implications of this gender identities reordering and its effects on power relations between men and women in the

closing section of the chapter pointing to the possibilities of *unmaking* militarized forms masculinity in the future.

Gender regime in Soviet and Post-Soviet Ukraine

Gender regime in the Soviet Union

The conception of state socialism and its legitimation in the former Soviet Union were predicated on gender and the gendering of power relations (Verdery 1996). Ashwin (2000) notes that the Soviet state consolidated its rule by uprooting traditional gender roles characteristic of pre-Soviet peasant societies. Aiming to destroy the old order and establish a new one, the Soviet state constructed a triangular set of gender relations where the state took the primary position vis-à-vis men and women. Nationalizing the means of production and controlling consumption through a system of centralized planning, socialist regimes legitimated their rule by redistributing social and material goods. Total state control of production and consumption was ostensibly for the sake of citizens, who were seen as state dependants. As Verdery points out, “Using this premise, socialist paternalism constructed its “nation” on an implicit view of society as a family, headed by a “wise” Party that, in a paternal guise, made all the family’s allocative decisions as to who should produce what and who should receive what reward - thus a “parent-state”” (Verdery 1996: 64). In this manner, the state positioned itself as the ultimate Patriarch, designating the Communist Party as its embodiment and subordinating the citizenry. Feminist scholars (Watson 1993) contend that this ideology and practices equally infantilized men and women and reduced their position to that of children vis-à-vis the state. This infantilization had especially grave consequences for men who lost their status as father-patriarch and breadwinner. In many ways, these policies equalized gender relations in Soviet families, putting men and women in similarly precarious and restrained positions.

After the initial consolidation of power, the Soviet regime used gender relations to entrench its power and mold citizen identities supportive of the state-spurred modernization projects. Despite the equalization process mentioned above, the roles of women and men in achieving these goals were seen as distinctively different (Ashwin 2000). The image of “superwoman” was cultivated by the state with the aim of promoting a double duty for women – to work and also to produce new generations of workers (Koshulap 2012). The embrace of heavy industrialization and the building of the centralized economy as core elements of state socialism required the Soviet state to increase its labour force. In this context, women were seen as valuable contributors to the economic input, as workers building the socialist system. Institutionalized full employment not only encouraged, but required women to join the workforce.

Women’s integration into the labour force was accompanied by various legal rights to enable them to work at full capacity with little interruption for childcare. For example, the Soviet state legalized and made abortion accessible, with short term exceptions during Stalin’s rule, to increase women’s control over their bodies and reproductive functions (Watson 1993: 1). Some provisions, such as generous maternal leave and childcare programs/facilities aimed at providing women with “protection” in their capacity as mothers (Ashwin 2000). The Soviet state treated motherhood with special respect, as it ensured the production of the next generation of workers and perpetuated the rule of the state. By and large, the “superwoman” image of women as mothers and workers increased the status of women and their ability to work made women financially more autonomous.³⁹ At the same time, Soviet pronatalist politics left very little space for women’s

³⁹ The policy of full employment masked the gendered patterns of recruitment and wage differentials between men and women, with women predominantly occupying low skilled positions and earning substantively less. Outside of employment, the emancipation of women as workers did not affect the domestic sphere and women were expected to do all the work. Soviet policies, thus, resulted in women undertaking a double burden of work and domestic responsibilities with some feminists calling the Soviet politics women’s “faux emancipation” (Johnson and Saarinen 2013).

interests apart from these reproductive and productive roles and did not allow women to freely control their lives (Rivkin-Fish 2010). The obligation of women to provide labour force was viewed as a citizen responsibility, not a private decision, with state facilitating reproduction and childrearing. In the 1970s and 1980s, the concerns about low fertility rates intensified the discourses that promoted family values and childrearing responsibilities, positing them as women's "mission" (ibid). Women were encouraged to attend to their "natural role" of mothering instead of actively participating in the labour force.

Whereas women's "natural function" was that of mothers, the role of men as fathers was substantially marginalized by the Soviet ideology (Koshulap 2012). There was no place in state policies for men to be engaged as fathers, as the state enacted the role of the patriarch through managing the means of production and distributing resources at its discretion. The positioning of the Soviet state as the main decision-maker and provider of goods relative to families left men feeling on the periphery of family life. In addition, Soviet legislation favored women in divorce settlements and was dismissive of the father's rights, which put women in advantageous position vis-à-vis men in working through family conflicts (Zdravomyslova and Temkina 2013).

Instead, men were perceived as state builders, soldiers and workers (Ashwin 2000; Koshulap 2012). They were expected to serve in leadership positions and build the Soviet system. This expectation enhanced their social status, mobilizing masculinity for state building purposes. Men's citizenship duty was also conceived in relation to military service, which was compulsory for and exclusive to male citizens. The duty of military service designated men as soldiers and defenders of the state, ready to take up arms at state's call. Eichler (2011) notes the understanding of mandatory military service went well beyond the defense of the country. It was framed as a duty of male citizenship, with men urged to prove their patriotism and loyalty to the state in the military

enterprise. It was also regarded as an institution of male socialization, a rite of passage into manhood (ibid).

After the Great Patriotic War, the cult image of a man as a soldier and defender gained additional prominence. Men were praised and lionized for their sacrifices to defend women, children and the state. This “paternal heroism” mythologized men as defenders who “take up arms reluctantly and *only* to protect the innocent from harm” (Eichler 2011: 49). This hegemonic form of defender masculinity was popularized in official discourses, films and other channels of state propaganda. The paired normative female image positioned women as a “weaker sex” needing men to take care of them. As Zdravomyslova and Temkina (2013: 49) write, “alongside this hero, the woman was the helpmate, the one who must be protected, the one who waited for her man’s brief home leaves but at the same time was herself performing feats of labour for the fatherland.” The positionality of women validated the hegemonic discourse describing men as “defenders,” giving it credence and legitimacy.

In the late Soviet period, this image became somewhat redundant because the prestige of the military declined during the *glasnost*’ period across social strata. Partly, it had to do with the exposure of the social problems in the army, such as bullying, drug usage, poor service conditions (Gross 1990). The physical and psychological violence perpetrated on conscripts were revealed by the media and resulted in women’s alert about the situation (Lebedev Colin 2011). More broadly, the increased political openness and late Soviet liberal discourse created a *quasi-public* sphere that allowed for a partial critique of the Soviet regime and its policies. Zdravomyslova and Temkina (2013) contend that this generated a discussion about the masculinization of women and the feminization of men as social problems caused by the Soviet policies. It was posited that the inability of men to perform traditional male roles due to restrictions

on political freedom and property caused the degeneration of men. In addition, the estrangement of men from family affairs was critiqued for leading to “absent fatherhood” where boys were raised in the environment that lacked the influence of older males. The consequence of it, it was argued, was a distorted notion of manhood with men becoming either emasculated or adopting aggressive behavior in opposition to feminine influence (ibid). These critiques led to the discourses about *the crisis of masculinity* that stressed men’s inability to be “men” (Zdravomyslova and Temkina 2013).

Shifts in gender regime after Ukraine’s independence

The collapse of the Soviet Union was accompanied by the masculinization of the public and economic spheres and the reinterpretation of gender relations along traditional and essentialist lines. Structural transformations, including the reorganization of economic and political life, had a negative effect on women’s status in Ukraine, similar to other Eastern European countries. The restructuring of the centralized economy into a market system severely disadvantaged women, often excluding them from the workforce and forcing many below the poverty line (Predborska 2005). Many implicit mechanisms in structural adjustment programs marginalized women; jobs occupied by women were made redundant or women were punished for family-related absenteeism from work (ibid). The direct transportation of Western employment patterns negatively affected women’s occupational status, restraining their access to training and limiting their employment prospects. Even though the unemployment rates have risen less in Ukraine in comparison to other Eastern European countries, income levels have plummeted. As Smith (2000) shows, massive reductions in wages helped to retain labour within firms, but the social and economic costs of labour retention resulted in the feminization of poverty and heightened precarity for many female employees. As Watson (1993) indicates, similar trends appeared across Eastern Europe,

marginalizing women in the labour force and resulting in the masculinization of public and economic affairs.

The Soviet implosion also led to the reinterpretation of the Soviet policies on gender relations. In Ukraine, women's emancipation as workers and a lack of family autonomy were critiqued as major sources of social, national and economic problems (Zdravomyslova and Temkina 2013; Zhurzhenko 2004). The restoration of "the strong traditional family" was seen as constituting the remedy for social, economic and national ills (Zhurzhenko 2004). The return to the traditional family was considered able to address the economic decline, making the family the main unit of market relations and enhancing family resilience in the face of economic crisis. Socially, the reestablishment of traditional family was seen as able to address the distortions imposed by the Soviet rule, where men were emasculated and denied the role of the patriarch and women were forced to assume working responsibilities at the expense of the family. Politically, the resurrection of strong family was supposed to address the national crisis, rejuvenating the nation and returning it to pre-Soviet traditional ways of life. As Zhurzhenko (2004) explains, the strong traditional family was understood as a heterosexual nuclear one, consisting of two parents and their children, with the man as the breadwinner and a nonworking woman. The rise of neofamilialism, as Zhurzhenko terms it, constructed women as mothers and nurturers of families, with men represented as breadwinners and valued for their money earning and decision-making qualities.

Amidst the political, economic and social upheavals of the 1990s and the rise of neofamilialism, two models of femininity became dominant in post-Soviet Ukraine: "Berehynia" and "Barbie" (Kis 2005). The first model has to do with the pagan goddess Berehynia, or the Hearth-mother, who protects the family, as well as Ukrainian national identity more generally.

This image draws on the myth of Ukrainian matriarchy, in which Ukrainian women are seen as having a particular advantage in family leadership, and the maternal function enjoys special respect and prestige. In contemporary Ukraine, “Berehynia” has been portrayed a carrier of national identity and as a source of women’s empowerment. In discourse drawing on the symbol of Berehynia, women are encouraged to take maternal care of the entire Ukrainian nation. As Kis (2005) notes, this model of femininity hinges on a traditional understanding of women’s role, but expands the idea of motherhood to embrace the nation. In Ukraine, the relations between women, motherhood and the hearth are seen as biologically driven and have nothing whatsoever to do with social constructs. “This is so much the case”, writes Rubchak (1996: 318), “that the entire idea of renewing the nation, or building a young state (...) has paradoxically been perceived by society as inseparable from the implicit reversal (in effect the ‘antiquation’) of the role of women.” Amidst the intensification of the nationalist discourses and the rise of neofamilialism with its emphasis on family life and the private sphere, these views have become popular.

The second image – Barbie (i.e. referring to the ubiquitous Barbie doll) – is associated with market ideology and consumer culture. This canon of femininity promotes the idea of women’s success as depending on their appearance, their clothing and their ability to remain physically attractive to men. Kis notes: “The Barbie model derives not only from the doll that bears this name but also from a lifestyle associated with it. Beautiful, sexy, charming, and correspondingly turned out, a “Barbie woman” is designed to attain success as a pleasant, attractive toy for a man” (Kis 2007).

Both canons of femininity are rooted in an essentialist understanding of women’s identity that emphasizes women’s reproductive functions and their sexual appeal. As there is widespread acceptance of “naturally” defined gender roles in Ukrainian society, there has been

little effort to challenge these representations of women. However, Zhurzhenko (2001) notes that one form of women's identity that can be seen as resisting the essentialist cage is the businesswoman. Female entrepreneurship was one of the identities adopted by women under free market ideology, but it has remained peripheral. Women entrepreneurs and businesswomen have faced double challenge, trying to realize their aspirations in an environment of great economic instability, riddled with patriarchal stereotypes and discrimination. The model of businesswoman has remained marginal, accessible only to a small number of women and does not imply the rejection of traditional gender roles (ibid.).

Dominant forms of masculinity, meanwhile, have evolved from breadwinner and Cossack ideals. The first image of masculinity, the breadwinner or businessman, stems from Western ideals of independence, freedom and financial success. Accordingly, this normative form of masculinity promotes an image of men who are professionally resourceful and active in the market. Men were expected to seize new opportunities allowed under the market economy and act on them for the financial benefit of their family and society at large. The ideal of men as breadwinner was integral to the rise of neofamilialism in Ukraine, recasting the normative roles of men towards those encouraged under new order. The businessman model is close to the traditionally available model of breadwinner, which frames men as the main providers for their families.

The proliferation of this normative image of men as providers, however, was accompanied by an economic decline and many structural adjustments in post-Soviet Ukraine. In reality, many men found it impossible to live up to the high standards of the successful and financially stable man. The economic hardships and the experiences of men, including their loss of employment and social status, re-opened space for discourses on "lost masculinity,"

emphasizing men's demoralization, degeneration and loss of manhood. Those men grappling to survive in the face of immense economic decline and political transformation were seen as deprived of manliness. Men suffering from chronic homelessness ended up at the bottom of the hierarchy, representing "failed hegemonic masculinity" in post-Soviet Ukraine (Riabchuk 2012). Demographic tendencies reflect the dire of situation of men caught up in the midst of economic and political transformations. As Nordstrom (2007:224) indicates, the annual suicide rate in Ukraine rose steadily since 1988 with the risk of suicide being six times higher for men than women. In addition, 20 percent of men suffered from alcohol abuse and incidents of drug abuse rose substantially. These numbers indicate that many men struggled immensely to adjust to changes introduced under the market system and often found it impossible to fulfill the role of breadwinner or businessman.

The second form of masculinity gaining prominence after the disillusion of the Soviet Union was that of Cossack. It refers to a real, although generalized character from the Ukrainian past: Cossacks of the 15th-18th centuries represented a heavily militarized community of men, who fought for freedom from imperial powers and played an important role in Ukrainian history. Bureychak (2012) notes that in contemporary Ukraine, this form of masculinity has been heavily idealized, with the portrayal of Cossacks as brave and devoted heroes in service of the nation and state. Much like the glorification of Berehynia, the celebration of the Cossack image has been reinvigorated by discourses about national revival and fighting for national values. It was also pursued as a way of steering Ukraine away from the Soviet legacy with its celebration of men as defenders of the Soviet state towards a path seen as more authentic and true of Ukrainian character.

The Maidan protests of 2013-2014 reinvigorated and amplified these versions of Ukrainian militarized masculinity, drawing on the representation of male protesters as "Cossacks,"

“Ukrainian Insurgent Army fighters” and “Defenders of the Motherland” (Channell-Justice 2017). The presence of women on Maidan was celebrated by some scholars and activists as creating a space for women’s empowerment and gender egalitarianism (Martsenyuk 2015). Indeed, the presence of women at the protests in Kyiv was both visible and acknowledged. At the start of the Maidan protests, they comprised 42.8% of the protesters (Kiev International 2013). Yet visibility and equality are different matters. Analysis conducted by Khromeychuk (2014) and Channell-Justice (2017) reveals that women’s presence on the Maidan did not result in the equality of status. Female protesters were confined to supporting roles and seen as “helping make the Revolution,” rather than “making Revolution” (Khromeychuk 2014). They mostly cooked, made tea, and provided medical assistance. When the demonstrations got violent, women were physically squeezed out of the Maidan under the pretense of “their own safety.” They were given a voice only in certain limited capacities, as the mothers of the protesters, as victims or as supporters of male revolutionaries (ibid.). Women were excluded from barricades and male-dominated spaces because of their “innate inaptitude” for fighting and defense. The self-defence units formed for the Maidan protests and the decision-making within them were heavily masculinized and militarized; women were marginalized and their engagement was limited.

Every dimension of the Maidan was gendered. The public stage for speeches and pronouncements was not accessible to women to the same extent as it was to men. The mottos and posters were framed in gendered language, calling on women to cook and men to join the defense units. As Khromeychuk (2014) notes, most women willingly undertook traditional tasks and found these arrangements natural and legitimate. The feminists who were present were marginalized and often physically threatened and even attacked (Channell-Justice 2017). They struggled to popularize their claims for gender equality among the protesters, attempting to become engaged

in the Maidan structures created by men. The conventional position of men was to dismiss women's participation in defense units and recognize it only to shame other men into action (Khromeychuk 2014). Despite the Maidan rhetoric promoting "European values" of equality and inclusion as the models for Ukraine's future, the protests re-traditionalized gender roles and reinvigorated the protectionist rhetoric, by which women were put in subordinate and passive positions of "the protected." Feminist scholars (Khromeychuk 2016) note that some women still found space to engage in non-traditional roles on Maidan creating female only self-defence units and opposing the discourses about women as "supporters of the revolutionaries," but these initiatives were marginalised and did not substantively affect the gendered nature of the protests where men were positioned as protectors and revolutionaries and women as their helpmates.

Mobilization amidst the Donbas war: male defenders and their female guardians

The events rapidly unfolding in post-Maidan Ukraine amplified the rhetoric of protection, with men seen as defenders – by both men and women. The shocking annexation of Crimea in March of 2014 followed by the violence on Donbas created an environment of fear and uncertainty across Ukraine. Russia's annexation of Crimea and the involvement of Russian troops in the subsequent actions led many of my respondents to conceptualize the war as Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and/or Ukraine's war for independence. During my subsequent visits to my research sites, I encountered large "Russian Ukrainian War" signs in the volunteering spaces, attesting to the perceptions of the war among volunteers as a defense war.⁴⁰ In these circles, the Ukrainian army and volunteer battalions were seen as necessary for the survival of the country, and mobilized soldiers and volunteer battalion fighters were praised as those protecting women, children and the country from the external enemy. As I discuss later in the chapter, this appreciation

⁴⁰ I discuss the conceptualization of war and Russia's role in it in the Chapter on National Identities.

took various forms in volunteer sites, including posters that pictured combatants as defenders, prevalent representations of them as heroes, true patriots and “the cream of the nation.”

The military mobilization amidst the Donbas unfolded along gendered lines, drawing on an institutionalized gender regime in Ukraine and the masculinized character of Ukraine’s Armed Forces (see photo 5.1). The overwhelming majority of the conscripted in the army and voluntary fighters were men. In 2014-2015, 22,000 troops from the National Guard were stationed in the conflict area. This number includes 500 (0,023%) women. In total, the number of the Armed Forces in the “anti-terrorist” operation reached 73,000 (with reserves) in August of 2015, but the total number of women partaking in the ATO was 938 persons (Martsenyuk et al. 2016). Women were present in the Armed Forces of Ukraine outside of the war zone, constituting about 10 percent of its personnel, but they occupied positions in the “feminine” areas, such as accounting, logistics, communication and medical personnel or positions that were underpaid and unattractive for male personnel. The low presence of women in the anti-terrorist operation translated into their discursive and infrastructural invisibility with scholars terming their participation as “Invisible Battalion” (Martsenyuk et al. 2016). This amplified the perception that men fight on the front whereas women should seek other ways for engagement.

Women as guardians of the nation

There are two modes of femininity, which became prominent in women’s articulation of their wartime duties. The first mode resonates with the archaic symbolism of “Beregynia” mentioned previously, whereby women are guardians of the collective national identity. When the worth of men is defined in relation to their readiness to engage in military service with the aim to protect, some women saw their duty as saving the lives of the “*most worthy men*” of the nation, thus evoking the nationalistic rhetoric as a driving force of their work:

The first 3-4 waves of mobilization included “the cream of the nation” and this genetic pool has been destroyed. What’s going on is the destruction of our national genetic pool! You know, someone asked me: Why the hell are you volunteering for the army? Do you need this headache? You are a well-off person, you can live happily under any authorities, just accommodate and have a worryless life. I answered – this is my selfish interest. I have a 24-year-old daughter. She will get married one day and I will have grandchildren. Who will they all marry? The genetic pool is being destroyed. I want to preserve the genes of worthy men for next generations. Because all good men with brains and education are fighting in this war now. I want to save their lives. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs’k, 14 Dnipropetrovs’k 2015)

The understanding of women’s role as guardians of soldiers shapes volunteering practices in many ways. Female volunteers often accompany their work with rituals and prayers meant to protect the lives of those on the front. For example, camouflage net knitters (*viazalnytsi*) in Odesa perform a sprinkling rite, blessing their knitted products with holy water before sending them off to the front. This ceremony, well known in the Eastern Orthodox Church, is done with the aims to protect those on the front using the knitted camouflage and save them from death. As one of my respondents recounted: “Boys told us that one of their friends stepped on landmine trip wire while wearing a camouflage gear made by us. Given the circumstances, he was destined to get killed, but he survived the injury. He only lost his leg. We got a call from the front right after with lots of gratitude. The boys said that there was something very special about our camouflage as it saved their friend’s life. I think this is all thanks to our prayers and the love we invest into the work.” These rituals and assistance were conducted for the sake of the future community - the nation - rather than the person (male) himself. These practices signify the ways female volunteers see themselves not only as guardians of individual soldiers, but protectoresses of the nation and its “genetic pool” more generally. Caring for the soldiers provided a venue for some female volunteers to express their national sentiments and preoccupations, investing their labour into the cultural and biological reproduction of the nation by “saving worthy men.”

Drawing on the image of Berehynia as a protectoress of the state and nation, other female volunteers said that their goal lies in the desire to preserve those men capable of post-war reconstruction. This way, they constructed a connection between men and state-building, which was posited as predominantly men's business during Soviet rule. Again, female preoccupations here were not limited to individual soldiers and their precariousness, but expressed concerns over the future of the community conceived within a national and statist framework:

The goal of my volunteering is to provide help to individuals in need. But more generally, I feel I am on a mission to save men's genetic pool. I know that sooner or later the war will be over and someone will have to rebuild the country, bring it out of the ashes and make it thrive. We need to make sure the country's borders are protected. To these ends, we need a strong army, we need strong and healthy men. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 25 June 2015)

The female only volunteer network in Odesa directly associated their volunteer work with the culturally resonant symbol of the protectoress, naming itself "Berehynia." Female volunteers from this network attached "Berehynia" notes to the parcels for the front and decorated them in a way that emphasized the "feminine side" of assistance (Photo 5.2). This included ornaments and artsy designs as well as handmade Berehynia motanka doll traditionally made as a talisman for protection and happiness. The willingness of female volunteers to invest their energies and time into the production of traditional dolls, rituals and ornaments amidst limitless war needs signified that they saw it as an important part of their volunteer practices, something that affectively ties them with combatants on the front and creates gendered solidarities between defenders and their guardians within the national framework for bonding. Through these feminized aspects of volunteering, women emphasized their feminine character which resonates with need for protection.

It is important to note that this mode of relationality between female volunteers and male combatants does not always precede engagement, but can develop as a result of it. Talking

about the “mission to preserve men,” my respondent mentioned that she clearly formulated the mission half a year after active volunteering. She came to this conceptualization after intense socialization with other volunteers and soldiers. Helping out the wounded, fundraising for vests and protective gear for soldiers and being in constant communication with people involved in the war effort influenced her ways of thinking and the modes of identification with those on the front. Through interactions, she made a link between soldiers, national community and the state, coming to see soldiers as important for the reproduction of the nation and the defense of the state. Similarly, other respondents noted that their initial reasons for engagement were driven by the fear of violence spillover or the need to “do something” in attempts to cope with stress and anxieties, generated by war. Over time, they have come to reinterpret their role in wartime volunteering, using gender-charged language to talk about volunteer work and reasons for engagement. The process of retrospective re-evaluation of roles and meanings within volunteering points to the reordering of gender identities in volunteer communities with shifts occurring along a continuum towards the more traditional and essentialist interpretations of gender roles and their strong national connotations.

Women as mothers

In addition to representing women as “Berehynias” of the nation, some interviewees articulated their engagement in voluntary movement as an extension of their maternal responsibilities, drawing on “the women as mothers” representations. Commenting on her observation about the prevalence of women in volunteer networks, one of my respondents noted:

I think the reason why mostly women engage in volunteering lies in the fact that a woman is a mother before she is anything else. Even if she doesn't have a family or children yet, nature endowed her with a motherhood instinct. She is a mother. She always thinks... What is she thinking about? About a husband, a child, a family... Even if she has a job, she rushes back home, thinking what to cook for dinner. It's not the husband's concern! A husband has to make money

so that his wife can get what is needed for the family. That's why women are in leading positions when it comes to volunteering. They are go-getters. We knew nothing about uniforms, ammunition or weapons when we started volunteering. Now we know everything and can get anything our "boys" need! (Fieldwork, Odesa, 10 June 2015).

Other women mentioned that they feel the responsibility to help, because those "boys" on the front, regardless of their age are "our children," "our husbands" and "our family." In the context where soldiers were conceptualized as "children" and "husbands," volunteering was conceived as in terms of familial interests and welfare. Gendering of volunteer work as part of familial responsibilities is highlighted by this quote:

At the outset of war, we knew nothing about ammunition and military supplies. We had to learn everything! If I have to find out something, I ask more experienced volunteers for advice. I go and look at other people do it. This is how I learn. It's the same as getting married. When a girl gets married, she doesn't know how to take care of the household. She has to learn how to cook, how to do laundry and clean around the house. It's the same thing with volunteering. We learn on the fly. We are very efficient. Men are not capable of doing what women can. We are driven by the maternal instinct and can complete any task if necessary. We worry about "our boys." Even when we know that they have food, we want to make sure that they have something good to eat. Men will never be as good as women in identifying the needs. Men don't understand what it takes to create a good caring environment for "the boys" (Fieldwork, Odesa, 15 June 2015).

These narratives of "soldiers as children" and "volunteering as taking care of the household" are related to those of "Berehynia," as they construct "the people" as a "big family" and "the country" as a big household that require a feminine protectress to function properly. These discourses are distinct from the Soviet gender regime that was organized around a fatherly patron embodied by the state (Verdery 1996) and are reminiscent of older traditional representations of gender identities and roles in pre-Soviet Ukraine.

The discourses of “one big family” also define the understanding of volunteer responsibilities and the quality of engagement. Framing volunteer work as driven by “maternal instincts” constructs men as incapable of it and excludes them from certain types of engagement altogether. As the paternal instinct is not seen as being as strong as the maternal one, men are regarded as biologically incapable of providing the same levels of care and, by extension, undertaking volunteer-related responsibilities. The gendering of volunteer work as an extension of the household and familial responsibilities posits men as less suitable for it. Volunteering is posited as women’s prerogative as it is female business to make sure that everything is in order and the household is managed properly. As the quote illustrate, women feel a sense of empowerment through this type of engagement thinking of themselves as “go-getters” who are skilled and efficient in the domestic sphere. Given women’s traditional role in purchasing, cleaning, preparing food for the family and their skills in maximizing limited resources to feed the family, their work is viewed as more valuable in view of the endless scope of wartime needs. Managing households in the times of economic scarcity has equipped women with coping strategies on how to minimize expenses and ensure the survival of “the family” and “the nation,” the skills seen as lacking in men. These discourses and practices highlight the primacy of culture and gender ideology and gender socialization in sustaining volunteer work.

It is important to mention that men have also been engaged in volunteering. My male respondents predominantly saw it as a substitute for military service. Drawing on the symbolic representation of men as defenders, some of my respondents referenced their willingness to join the army as an initial response to the outbreak of war. Certain life circumstances, such as poor health or professional commitments, prevented them from joining the military. They regarded their volunteering as compensation for not being “on the front.” One of my respondents said that he

arrived at the conscription office right after “things started heating up in Eastern Ukraine,” because “he couldn’t sit at home any longer.” Even though he had previously served in the Soviet army and had some experience of military service, he was not allowed to join the armed force because of health problems and disability. He then became actively engaged in helping out soldiers with necessary supplies and equipment. As he explained it, volunteering allowed him to help but also prove his manhood. Frequent trips to the front and the associated risks forced him to face danger and attest his manliness. Another respondent joined a voluntary network after he was demobilized from the military service. He referenced his acquired solidarity with the soldiers on the front to explain the reasons for his subsequent voluntary engagement. These and other men evoked the narratives of military service in articulating their willingness to engage in “backstage” mobilization and framed volunteering as part of the defense aimed to protect the country.

By and large, the realities of wartime mobilization where men were called to take up arms in defense of the country and the narratives of masculine protection that posit men as defenders and women as their guardians engendered a clear sexual division of labour amidst the Donbas mobilization. Many of my respondents adopted this paradigm without questioning. One woman said:

There are a lot of women in the voluntary movement, because we support men. This is what women are supposed to do... if we turn back to history, women always supported men, helped them, cross-stitched handkerchiefs for them, prepared food. Women always organized fundraisers, charity events. So, historically this is what women have been doing and it’s right. It’s normal that the man carries on war and the woman provides for him. This is a normal natural process (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs’k, 14 August 2015).

The sexual division of labour is reinforced by a clear differentiation between the “battle front” and the “home front” or “rear” (Yuval-Davis 1993). As Yuval-Davis explains, the possibility of sustaining military warfare without women’s participation as combatants and the

ability to generate some surplus resources to sustain warfare results in the emergence and reproduction of a routinized sexual division of labour between men and women. In the case of Ukraine, the territorially constrained nature of the war and the primarily male conscription sustained the division of labour and relegated women to supporting roles.

The distinction between “the front” and “the rear” was replicated by the men who insisted on women staying at the rear to provide support rather than joining the army. Some of my female interviewees mentioned that they felt the urge to “take up the arms” and “fight” at times. Yet, they were discouraged by those on the front who said that “we [men] will cope on the front without your assistance” and that “you [women] should stay at the rear and make sure that soldiers have somewhere to return to after the war” (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs’k, 21 August 2015). Moreover, some men saw it as shameful for women to participate in a fighting capacity as “it reflects badly on them as men if women have to take up the arms and join the ranks of the military” (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs’k, 27 August 2015). These narratives contributed to differential engagement of men and women during the wartime mobilising, essentialising gender roles and limiting women’s role to supporting functions. It also demonstrates how gender boundaries become reinforced by men through their insistence that the front is a “male-only” terrain not suitable for women.

To be sure, the war zone has never been an exclusively male zone and this is especially the case in the Donbas war. Since women assist the army and volunteer fighters in a multitude of ways, they constantly travel to the frontlines to deliver supplies and provide assistance. My respondents recounted numerous stories of being caught under shelling or escaping from dangerous situations in the war zone. Others travel to the frontlines to locate the bodies of missing soldiers or collect information about their whereabouts. An increasing number of female

volunteers have travelled to the front to support combatants emotionally, spending time with them and showing gratitude for their military service (as I demonstrate in the upcoming section). The presence of women on the frontlines has been significant and paramount to the overall success of the war effort.

My respondents, both men and women, were somewhat divided about women's presence on the front. Some viewed women travelling to the battlefield positively, seeing it as a way to show solidarity and "distract" men from war. Commenting on having a female leader travelling to the frontlines, one of my male respondents remarked: "Well, she manages everything well. She finds a common language with "the boys." She can always smooth out a conversation with jokes and smiles. Besides, men on the front *want* to see a woman. They are separated from home and... we are all animals. They don't want to see more beards over there" (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 3 June 2015). In this instance, we can see that women are regarded not only as providers of assistance on the frontlines, but also as objects of aesthetics and beauty. Men want to hear "women's voices," "talk to women" and "get inspired by their presence." Referencing men's nature, other volunteers considered women's presence at the frontlines undesirable, as it could disturb military lifestyle or provoke men's sexual desires: "I think that women don't fit in the war landscape. This is a male-only zone with its own rules and principles," remarked a female volunteer from Dnipropetrovs'k. "Men have their physiological needs. In the summer when they see ladies in short shorts and a big cleavage, it provokes a sexual reaction with no way to fulfill it. What are they supposed to do? Rent out a prostitute?", remarked another (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs'k, 15 August 2015). Others agreed that women can visit the frontlines, but only with certain tasks, such as cleaning in the military unit, cooking food or doing laundry. While my respondents expressed diverging attitudes about the presence of women on the frontlines in

volunteer capacity, these discussions shared in common the representation of women as objects of beauty and aesthetics that can at once boost the military morale and distract combatants from the military duties. The realities of Ukraine with a strong dependence of the army and volunteer fighters on civilian assistance, however, rendered these discussions secondary to the pressing war needs and mandated women's assistance on the front and away.

Some women did get engaged militarily on the front, despite social reservations about their aptitude for military service. In total, 938 female combatants took part in the anti-terrorist operation as of October 2015 (Martseniuk et al. 2016). The study conducted by Martsenyuk, Grytsenko and Kvit (2016) reveals that most women joined the front voluntarily (40 out of 42 female respondents) and only one third of them (17 out of 42) managed to get formal positions in the military. Most interviewed women had no official standing in the military and received no wage, a situation that severely disadvantages women when it comes to access to social protection for war veterans and other legal and social benefits conferred by the state to those engaged in war. Those women who managed to get formal positions in the military often had to face the reality of their official title not corresponding to their responsibilities as certain professional occupations are not available to women in the Ukrainian military. The study documented incidents of female rocket operators registered as accountants or drone operators listed as cooks. As noted by the researchers, disparities in women's contributions and their legal status in the military resulted in the infrastructural invisibility. Women reported not being supplied with tailored uniforms, hygiene products, proper health care, etc. In addition to legal and infrastructural challenges, women on the frontlines are confronted with gender-based stereotypes that frame them as inapt for combat and military service and limit their engagement to supporting roles (ibid). The situation somewhat improved in 2016, when the list of professions inaccessible to women – sappers, photographers,

and chemical welfare specialists among other professions in the military – was reformed in order to create a more inclusive environment for women (Stalo Vidomo 2018). According to recent reports, the number of women in the military increased and their presence might challenge the prevalent discourses about the inaptitude of women in the military and war as a male only terrain.

Women’s army to the rescue

Provision of material supplies

Since the Ukrainian Army was in a state of disarray, lacking basic supplies and ammunition at the beginning of war, women’s supporting functions included a multiplicity of tasks, ranging from collecting food supplies to procuring combat-related articles and delivering them to the front. Chapter 2 documents the needs existent in the Ukrainian army at the outset of the Donbas war and discusses the limits of the Ukrainian state to address them. Amidst limited statehood, volunteers were quick to respond to the war needs by dressing soldiers and defenders “from head to toe.” Following the military mobilization, women became engaged in labour intensive initiatives to meet the needs of the front in the most cost-effective way possible. Jokingly mirroring the military units of organisation, “cooking squads (*sotnyas*)” were created in all three cities of my fieldwork, with women preparing and packing food for those on the front. “Camouflage netting battalions” were formed to produce miles of masking nets necessary for the protection of military equipment. They made camouflage overalls for intelligence personnel and sewed all sorts of garments for the army and voluntary battalions. All these tasks demanded hours of work requiring volunteers to become engaged in collecting resources, developing designs, cutting and sewing. Additional efforts were put into fundraising for items that could not be made by hand (military equipment, military uniforms, boots, etc.) with female volunteers often using their artistic skills to fundraise (see Photos 5.3 and 5.4 – artifacts for fundraising). Volunteers

established fundraising booths beside supermarkets, sold embroidery, and went on local news stations to raise awareness of the war and collect funds for those on the front.

“Sotnya Dalii Severyn” is one example of volunteer networks among many mushrooming at the rear in the summer of 2014. Formed in Odesa in early June 2014, it began as an initiative to collect funds for basic supplies, mainly socks. The network quickly grew in size, attracting many women eager to help those on the front. Volunteers rapidly diversified the range of products delivered to the battlefield and extended their outreach to multiple military units. When I joined volunteers packing boxes for the front in July 2015, I documented the following items being packed and sent to the front: cigarettes, wet napkins, coffee, chocolates, toothpaste, tooth brushes, facial cream, tea, soap, canned food, energy bars, cookies, and instant noodles – mostly items associated with domestic comfort. A great deal of thought and effort was invested into every aspect of work, including packing and shipping. Along with garments and food, each box contained a handwritten message with the contacts of volunteers, and notes of gratitude for military service. This was done to ensure that soldiers feel the care and support coming from “home.” It also intended to increase an outreach of the network, encouraging soldiers and volunteer battalion fighters to get in touch with volunteers, if they needed a word of support or any supplies.

The bulk of this work was done by women. Men helped indirectly by giving money or helping out in instances where women required their “muscles” to pack heavy boxes and send them to the front. Recruiting posters showing women knitting socks with determination or cooking food were available at different locations during my fieldwork. The posters made visible the division of labour, calling on female knitters (*vyazalnytsi*) to join the ranks of volunteers and locating men as heroic warriors requiring female care and help. Such posters helped recruit women,

creating a “women’s army” of sock knitters, cooks, seamstresses, working in solidarity with the military army of defenders on the front (Photos 5.5 and 5.6).

Men’s role as breadwinner prevented some of them from more active participation, since they were expected to financially provide for the family and had less opportunities for out of work engagement. There are considerable financial, familial and opportunity costs associated with volunteering, as it requires substantial time commitment and money. Women were more likely to have the time necessary for volunteer engagement as their income was seen as secondary for the family well-being. Particularly, Anderson (2017) observes that in Ukraine married couples often subvert the market meaning of money to enact a Soviet-style gender ideology. “By spending men’s money on “necessary” items and avoiding accessing women’s money in the household, couples construct men’s money as both visible and valuable while rendering women’s money non-fungible” (359). Through these practices, male privilege in the household is reproduced despite gains in women’s earnings and employment. Anderson argues that these arrangements served to stabilize gender relations during rapid social transition and preserve older ideals of masculinity and femininity.

As female income is ideologically positioned as less important, married women may enjoy more flexibility in terms of seeking engagement outside of the market. Some of my female respondents were unemployed at the time of interviews, saying that they either had to quit work for volunteering or withdraw from family business, with their husbands picking up financial responsibilities. Talking about volunteer engagement, female volunteers often referred to it as “a privilege” that they can “afford” thanks to their husbands’ financial support. One of my respondents mentioned that she has the means for volunteering because her husband makes a decent salary as a sailor and she lives off him. While he doesn’t actively participate in volunteer

work, his financial support enables her to contribute time and energy to volunteer-related tasks. Along with donating for some initiatives, he also gives money for gas expenses. Being able to use a car substantially increases efficiency, as noted by the respondent. Giving rides to soldiers visiting the city, bringing them snacks and bottles of water, delivering food and products fundraised by supermarkets to storage locations – it all requires constant mobility using a vehicle. On average, it adds up to 500 hryvnias (over \$25 USD at the time of fieldwork) in gas money per week, remarked my respondent. This is a substantial expense, given low salaries and an economic crisis in Ukraine. Similarly, one volunteer referenced her husband's good income as something that enables her to outsource childcare responsibilities to a nanny and free time for volunteering.

Single mothers, female breadwinners or those without familial support system had less opportunities to get engaged in volunteering. One of my respondents remarked that she was initially encouraged to volunteer by a friend of hers who provided her with the contacts of a volunteer network. The friend herself could not join, since she had two children to take care of and had to make a living (*zarabatyvat' na khleb*). Female volunteers also referenced familial support systems as enabling them to conduct volunteer-related work. Being able to leave children with grandparents is one way in which they freed time for volunteer work. Speaking of time availability for long shift at the hospital, Alexandra, a 36-year-old volunteer from Odesa mentioned that she would never be able to do it without the support of her mother and the mother of her husband who provided assistance with children and household responsibilities.

Undeniably, women with limited financial resources contributed to volunteer efforts as well, investing their labour, time and energies in various initiatives. The informal nature of volunteering with flexible hours of work and a wide range of needs allowed people of different economic backgrounds to find space for engagement on terms acceptable for them. Women found

it especially easy to get engaged as bringing some homemade food or knitting a few pairs of socks provided them an entry point into volunteer networks and often served to initiate long-term engagement. Besides, there was a general sense that the strength of the volunteer movement lies in its popular support where “everyone can contribute as much as they can” and “no help is too small to count.” At the same time, my findings suggest that the backbone of volunteer networks consisted of middle class women who had the resources to “afford” volunteering at full capacity, devoting numerous hours of time to supporting the war effort.

The collective nature of volunteer work allowed for social bridging among volunteers of diverse backgrounds. The social nexus of volunteering also presented an opportunity for female volunteers to engage their children in the assistance of combatants and internally displaced persons. Some of my respondents involved their children in the ongoing efforts, for example, to sort out and pack donated items or play with the children of IDPs. During my fieldwork visits, the children of volunteers babysat toddlers to enable their mothers to attend job interviews or trainings. Volunteer sites provided space for gender role learning not only for adult volunteers, but also for their children. Engaging children reinforced the conviction that everyone can help, regardless of their social and economic status or even age.

Emotional labour of female volunteers

When the need for emergency assistance subsided, female volunteers were increasingly driven by their desire to reduce the psychological distress associated with military service and provide encouragement to those on the front. The need for this kind of engagement had to do with the traumatic war realities more generally and with Ukraine’s precariousness in particular. The lack of military experience of new conscripts and voluntary fighters, as well as the lack of basic ammunition, clear instructions, or trust of the officers giving the orders made new conscripts

physically unprotected and vulnerable to psychological distress and trauma. Commenting on the precariousness and fragility of men in the military, one of my respondents noted:

One time I saw a bus arriving at the bus station. I peeked into it and saw that it was full of soldiers. They were black from dust and thin from malnutrition. I can't forget their eyes – they had dead eyes... They were standing there, completely demoralized and destroyed. As I understand, they were released from captivity and were on the way to the hospital. Some of them had their hands bandaged, others were just starved. They were incredibly skinny and looked horrible, not as humans... (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 12 June 2015)

This encounter haunted my respondent. She rushed to the grocery store to get them some food. Afterwards, she visited the hospital to express support and gratitude for military service. Her urge to help was linked to trauma and suffering related to the military service. Trauma mediation preoccupied many of my respondents, with some female volunteers confiding that combatants often call them before they anticipate shelling or feel that their life is endangered. In these moments of intimacy combatants confront their fear of death, voice their angst to female volunteers and seek comfort. Often, these calls and conversations strike a heavy cord, with soldiers saying final goodbye in anticipation of death and thanking for support. In these instances, female volunteers become an important source of emotional support, consoling soldiers and distracting them from gloomy thoughts.

Emotional labour touched on other painful aspects of military engagement. War inflicted death, loss and suffering of many individuals and families, carving spaces for engagement around traumatic experiences. The mediation of grief included the support of those soldiers who got injured at the front. A separate cluster of primarily female volunteers emerged in the summer of 2014 to take care of the wounded. Shukan (2016) documents the tasks undertaken by “Sisters of Mercy”, a volunteer network created in Kharkiv in the spring of 2014 to support soldiers hospitalised in the military hospital. The network consists of about 15 volunteers, mostly women,

aged 25 to 47, who help soldiers to come through traumatic experiences. Shukan notes that arranging food, clothing and medication and fundraising for surgeries, artificial limbs, and medical assistance abroad constitutes only a small fraction of material support provided by volunteers. This engagement is driven by affective bonds between combatants and female volunteers (Shukan 2018).

Phycological

These interactions are conducted from the position of male vulnerability with men being dependent on women for emotional care to get through traumatic experiences as well as other material supplies. In semi-private settings such as volunteer sites, these exchanges chart the trajectory for gender solidarities to unfold and strengthen, serving as a new basis for communication and community making. The traumatic nature of this type of assistance blurs distinctions between private and public, making female volunteers draw on their emotional resilience to support men whom they barely know, but feel deeply affectionate about. Through imaginative co-presence and compassion, female volunteers enable a new form of imagined community to emerge, the one that is deeply meaningful to them and motivates them for further engagement. Gendered nature of trauma mediation reinforces the positioning of women as men's supporters and reifies female representations around their innate ability to attend to the needs of others.

Trauma mediation goes beyond assistance to combatants with volunteers reaching out to their families and helping them cope with loss and grief. A number of volunteers I talked to were engaged in organizing funerals for the killed soldiers to relieve their families from this burden and cover the financial costs. One of my respondents, helping to locate missing bodies of soldiers,

remarked that families at times refuse to accept the death of their sons and do not come to receive their remains. Together with a priest, she worked to help some of the relatives to come to terms with their loss and mediate suffering. Accompanying parents to a morgue and helping them arrange transportation services for the remains were some of the ways volunteers sought to help and support the mourning families. Supporting children of diseased soldiers, helping them financially and emotionally were important preoccupations of volunteers during my fieldwork. In doing that, my respondents created public discourses about the sacrifice of the combatants, their heroism and worthiness in relation to the nation and the state.

It is important to note that emotional labour is not limited to the most traumatic moments. The psychological distress of military service in Ukraine is exacerbated by hostility to the Ukrainian army; for example, some local residents on Donbas see them as “perpetrators,” an image conflicting with the portrayal of military service as the embodiment of patriotism and courage in other regions of Ukraine. My respondents recounted stories of betrayal when local residents on Donbas informed the opposing side on the whereabouts of the Ukrainian soldiers, “correcting” sniper fire or greeted soldiers with food that was poisoned. The women sought to alleviate the psychological distress caused by these acts of disloyalty. As one of my respondents put it:

We want to express our appreciation of their service. They are suffering a lot! This is not the Great Patriotic War, where you are fighting for your country and you are a hero! We live in a divided country, where 50 – 60 percent of the population sees the soldiers as heroes, and 40 percent sees them as traitors that kill people of their own nationality. They told us stories of local residents spitting on them and screaming – go away! You brought war on our land! (Fieldwork, Odesa, 15 July 2015)

Contesting opinions over the value of military service were not limited to the war zone, but occasionally caused familial and social rifts. Female volunteers talked about the instances

when soldiers' wives sought divorce or denied children custody to them because of their disapproval of military service. A lack of social and familiar recognition posed a challenge to the representations of combatants as "heroes" with volunteers and added to the psychological distress of soldiers on the frontlines.

In these circumstances, female volunteers saw it as their responsibility to help soldiers cope with psychological and familial challenges. Encouragement, expressions of gratitude and solidarities of those staying "at the rear" were key in interactions with soldiers. The following two quotes capture well the transformations regarding the nature of volunteer work:

You know, previously soldiers needed life vests, helmets, fire-resistant gloves, assault vests, tactical masks to protect their face and eyes... All this ammunition reduces the number of wounded... but now, of course, a very important aspect of volunteering is moral support. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs'k, 3 August 2015)

There are volunteers who come, deliver supplies and go back. Sometimes with reports of transfer and acceptance. For me, communication is key. First of all, I mean communication where you exchange emotions and energy, when soldiers feel that there is someone visiting them and there is an emotional exchange. They feel it and it's very important to me. You communicate with everyone, they share their stories one after another. Many soldiers experience a real lack of communication with their families, worry for their children. That's why we are trying to fill in the communication gap as much as we can. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 11 June 2015)

The fast delivery of supplies was mostly associated with men. My male respondents mentioned that they prioritize efficiency and high mobility over other considerations during trips to the front. One of them remarked: "As a general rule, we try to cover 10 to 14 different locations during one trip to the contact line. Usually, we stay there over two or three nights. We try to do it as fast as we can."

In contrast to that, many female volunteers put emphasis on helping soldiers and voluntary fighters emotionally, which means spending time and communicating with them. One of my respondents remarked that a very important part of her trips to the war zone is "ATO hugs"

– an expression of emotional support and gratitude. She said: “This is nothing personal, I just have to embrace them – it is important for me and for them [soldiers]. I always tell them that this is our tradition – to hug it out. This is simply invaluable.” My respondent noted that these expressions of emotional exchange help combatants and female volunteers build trustworthy relationships and demonstrate the meaningfulness of war-forged friendships and encounters. Different initiatives drew on this understanding that emotional support is significant and meaningful.

My fieldwork findings suggest female volunteers, while investing emotionally into the wellbeing of soldiers, also see themselves as performing a “disciplining” function. A few of my female respondents noted that during their trips to the front they try to ensure that soldiers obey the rules of military service and do not go on the rampage. Alcoholism, stress associated with warfare and a poor selection process for conscripts were cited among the reasons for additional disciplining, something that came up several times in my interviews:

I had a situation when a soldier blew himself up after a fight with his wife... Family fights, plus alcohol... Alcohol and weapons is a dangerous mix! I always argue with them, I seriously threaten them saying that if they keep drinking, they will be left without volunteers’ support till the end of the war. It has some effect on them... You know the military enlistment office “helped us a great deal.” They conscripted those who had health issues, even though they have no right to do that, they conscripted chronic alcoholics. You know, when a man has been drinking vodka for 30 or 50 years, do you think he is going to stop at the front? No, it’s terrifying to be there, so he will drink twice as much! He will drink even more and then will walk through the minefield set up to prevent the enemy’s advance... (Fieldwork, Odesa, 14 July 2015)

As this quote illustrates, some female volunteers deploy the dependence of combatants on civilian assistance to pressure them into “proper behavior”. In these instances, women joined forces with the state to build an effective military force. Women took it upon themselves to fight men’s bad habits and protect them from harmful behavior. This social role of women drew on the gender norms prescribed in the late Soviet period. During that time, as Zdravomyslova and

Temkina (2013) note, the concerns over “men survival” led to state campaigns that placed a responsibility on women to combat these ills and protect men from unhealthy habits. In the context of volunteering, some women embraced the understanding of their duties as addressing the problematic practices of men and the need for this type of engagement was seen as especially important given the traumatic nature of military engagement.

Initiatives combining emotional care and disciplining of soldiers extended beyond the battlefield, springing across the cities of my fieldwork. Dnipropetrovs’k, for example, has become an important hub for transportation and military logistics. Female volunteers set up a comfort zone “Vokzal Dnipro” at the central train station. Arrangements have been made to accommodate soldiers and battalion fighters on their way to and from the front. About 60 to 80 female volunteers work in rotation 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to create a “home-like” environment for the soldiers passing through the train station. Soldiers can get food and tea while waiting for the train or rest for a few hours in a lodging arranged by volunteers. Female volunteers also take care of any administrative or logistical issues of soldiers who miss their train or have no money to get to a final destination. As explained by one of the volunteers, “the most important part of our volunteering at the train station is to ensure that no one leaves the station without a hug, a word of gratitude or encouragement.” The ambiguity of war with “many in the country not realizing that we are at war” convinced my respondents about the significance of these emotionally-charged expressions of gratitude. The emotional labour invested into this type of volunteering is of a delicate nature as volunteers try to determine soldiers’ willingness to socialize and share their stories, given their traumatic experiences. It also has a disciplining effect as women try to create an environment where men from the front could rest instead of “seeking trouble in the city.”

As this section indicates, civilian mobilization in Ukraine unfolded along gendered lines where men saw it as their duty to take up arms and fight whereas women got engaged in providing material and emotional assistance to them. In doing so, both men and women drew on the previously established gender norms where men were posited as soldiers and women as their guardians and protectress of the nation. Ukraine's limited state capacity and the endless scope of needs generated by war amplified need for assistance with women mobilising and creatively addressing the shortage of resources. The ambiguity of war and its traumatic nature heightened need for trauma mediation with women increasingly attending to the psychological and emotional challenges of combatants. This reinforced distinctive gender roles with men and women viewed as distinctive categories, that is groups of individuals endowed with specific biological and psychological characteristics. The shifts in the reinterpretation of gender identities occurred along the continuum towards more essentialized gender roles, rather than representing a rupture in the understanding of the gendered self.

Shifting forms of hegemonic masculinities and femininities among volunteers

How have volunteer work and socialization impacted hegemonic masculinities and femininities in volunteer communities? While the previous section alludes the reinterpretation of gender identities amidst war, I discuss these changes in greater detail here. I also note some of the ways in which shifting hegemonic forms of masculinity and femininity impact power relations in volunteer communities and beyond and structure the modes of engagement outside of volunteer sites.

As noted in the section on the existing gender regime in Ukraine, the late Soviet period and subsequent postsocialist transformation gave rise to the discourses about men's degeneration. Men's inability to exercise traditional roles as breadwinners and patriarchs of the family during

the Soviet times were critiqued for “infantilising” and “emasculating” men. Transition to the market economy did not substantively improve the situation. While new forms of successful masculinity emerged (namely that of businessmen), many men struggled to be financially successful and entrepreneurial in the environment of profound economic decline and social instability. The discourses about the degeneration of men continued to linger. Yet, recent military mobilization seems to have addressed *the crisis of masculinity*, making men into “real men” and arranging things “as they should be”. The following two comments illustrate the ways the perceived sense of male degeneration gave way to socially central and desirable forms of masculinity conceived in relation to warfare and defense:

Imagine, I have been divorced twice. I thought that all men were jerks (*kozly*), right? After getting engaged in volunteering, I saw men opening up in a new way. I realized that, as a matter of fact, they are *defenders*! That they are ready to sacrifice their lives for us, women and children, to live peacefully. It is only now that they saw themselves as ‘*true*’ men. Those, recently playing computer games, suddenly became ‘*true*’ men. War completely changed the way they look. Their faces are different now! I realized that our attitude towards men as ‘lazy domestic pets’ requiring laundry, cooking, and caring is wrong. The man is meant to be a defender by nature! Right now, our men finally got an opportunity *to become men* and we have to preserve this change. We have to support it and be grateful. When the war ends, we will have ‘*true*’ men. *These are men, who don’t kill, don’t shoot, but defend!* (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs’k, 14 June 2015)

I was always of an opinion that we have *weak* men. I thought that the worth of a man depends on how much money he makes. I regarded financial success as a true measurement of manhood. I always liked the men wearing a suit with a tie. Recent developments changed my attitude towards men. When the war started, I realized that we have many men performing their *direct role – the role of a defender...* who protects his own country. I saw that there are many men ready to defend. They don’t have to be two meters high, wide in the shoulders or be physically fit... Through volunteering I met guys that I would never find attractive if I saw them on the street. Never. But I realized that they are ‘*true*’ men. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 22 July 2015)

These quotations illustrate the changing forms of desirable masculinity, with “soldier / defender” becoming more recognized and cherished. Both of the above-cited female volunteers

initially refer to “the crisis of masculinity,” stressing the weakness and moral degradation of men before the war. The first points to the previous degeneration of “true men,” implying that the former domestication of men alienated them from their “true nature.” The second stresses the moral weakness and derogation characteristic of men’s identity in the past.

Another respondent noted that “women have spoilt men and turned them into spineless individuals” (*tryapki*) who can’t take care of themselves and are too reliant on women in everyday life. “They starve with a fridge full of groceries,” remarked still another. As Zdravomyslova and Temkina (2013) remind us, “‘*the crisis of masculinity*’ is always a *discursive fact* and it assumes a certain normative model of “true masculinity” and the possibility of actualizing the model of what it is to be a real man” (43; emphasis added). In other words, it implicitly presupposes the existence of *others*, i.e., successful and worthy men. In the second comment presented above, the hegemonic model of pre-war masculinity is defined in terms of financial success as well as professional performance and appearance, captured by the previously discussed “businessman” model. In this model, the ability to earn money and sustain a family was central to the positive perception of men, but war provided an opportunity to define who “*worthy*” men are. As the citations indicate, the women I interviewed celebrated the “masculinity” of men regained through warfare, linking the “true nature” of a man to military service and defense and seeing it as a remedy for emasculation. The significance of military service to the construction of manhood resurfaced again in the war on Donbas, with female volunteers underscoring that the roles assigned to men and women are different because men and women are different by nature. Many felt that war normalized relations between men and women, allowing men to *become* men and women to *become* women.

The verbs used by my interlocutors indicate the dynamic process of *gender performativity* (Butler 2003; 2006a). Notably, female volunteers stress the process of “becoming” a man and the importance of military service to enacting the desirable form of masculinity. As both respondents note, warfare affects the bodily appearance of men, altering “the way they look,” and “changing their faces.” The testimonies of female volunteers reveal the transformations in the ways men comport themselves, attuning their behavior, looks and practices to the image of a soldier. As one of my respondents observed: “Some men *want to appear* better and braver than they are” in order to assume the image of defender. They act in accordance with their understanding of what being a defender entails, often attuning their behavior and composure to the historically available image of the Soviet soldier or Cossack freedom fighters. These expressive forms of masculinity standardize men’s outward appearance, style and gestures, giving them an illusion of “essence” – something that is an integral part of one’s identity. These transformations point to the ways the disciplining powers of the military, available representations of military service and social pressure lodge onto the bodies of men to produce particular registers of behavior and aesthetics, subsequently naturalized through repetition.

The social pressure to embody these forms of masculinity often comes from women, who compel men to take on the image of defender. The female volunteers perceive men performing the role of defenders and soldiers positively, making this model of masculinity more central and prominent. Women’s comments about the appeal of men in the military and their praise of combatants’ heroism encourage men to conform to these representations and embody them to varying degrees. Female volunteers noted that they continuously tell soldiers how proud they are of men in the military and how grateful they feel for their protection. These displays of appreciation add to the social pressure of conforming to the image of defender in subtle, yet significant ways.

Others act more bluntly in encouraging men to conform to the image of defender. As one of my respondents indicated, it was “very important for her that her husband joined a defense unit” as she would lose respect for him otherwise and would not think of him as a “real man.” Ultimately, the forms of socially respectable and desirable masculinity in volunteer communities are reconstructed in relation to the military with women eager to embrace it and celebrate. This is indicative of the changing mode of hegemonic masculinities with military masculinity becoming culturally central.

The attractiveness of military service and its importance for the construction of “true manhood” was exemplified in yet another way. A few female volunteers indicated that the war attracts “all sorts of men” and some of them join out of considerations that differ from that of defense. Yet, she noted that their engagement on the front redeems their wrongdoings in the past and they should still be celebrated for their military service. Other volunteers stressed that they keep volunteer fighters in especially high esteem since these men joined the military voluntarily, out of patriotism and loyalty to the nation and the state. These cases illustrate that military service has come to be seen as a mark of honour and distinction regardless of men’s personal considerations in joining the military. Discursively, female volunteers elevate the status of men in the military and compare other men in relation to them.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) remind us that hegemonic masculinities do not have to be dominant in the statistical sense; in fact, only a minority of men might enact them. What characterizes hegemonic masculinities is that they are normative and used as a benchmark against which other men are evaluated. Commenting on the high number of women in volunteer networks and their frequent trips to the frontlines, one of my female respondents noted that male civilians feel ashamed to visit the front as volunteers “because of their convictions that men should be at

the frontlines fighting. For various reasons, be it family or fear, they don't want to join the military, but they feel uncomfortable going to the front as visitors and looking in the eyes of soldiers" (Fieldwork, Odesa, 22 July 2015). This quote suggests that some men at the rear define their worth in relation to those directly engaged in military service. There is a feeling that they do not live up to the expectations of what it means to be "a true man" if they do not go to the frontlines to fight. This sentiment indicates that in the circumstances of war, the soldier / defender model has become distinguished from other forms of masculinities in a way that places it at the center of manhood construction. This model has also partly displaced that of the businessman and addressed the perceived crisis of masculinity more generally. It is not novel, but draws on the institutionalized gender regime in Soviet and post-Soviet Ukraine, representing a shift along the continuum towards more essentialized gender order.

More broadly, shifting forms of hegemonic masculinity are related to the positive re-evaluation of the military as an institution. Amidst the recent events and the outbreak of violence, my respondents came to see an efficient army as necessary and paramount to Ukraine's survival and success as a state. As one of my respondents stated, "I was always of an opinion that we don't need an army. We don't have nuclear weapons anymore. We don't have gas. Who would ever want to attack us? As we see now, Russia found its imperial reasons to wage a war against Ukraine and we absolutely need an army for protection" (Fieldwork, Odesa, 12 July 2015). My respondents also re-evaluated the efficiency of the army in light of the recent events. In post-Soviet Ukraine, the army lacked social support because of various problems associated with its functioning, including rampant corruption, inadequate funding and salaries of the officers, and a constant downsizing of its personnel (Rozanov, Mokhovikov, and Stiliha 2002). Combined with other issues, such as high suicide rates and a history of drug and alcohol abuse, the Ukrainian army

enjoyed little support in the wider society. As one of my interviewees put it, “All my life I mistreated soldiers... I thought of them as beggars, asking for cigarettes and stuff... If you have nothing else to do with your life, you join the army. Right now, the attitude has changed completely” (Fieldwork, Odesa, 24 July 2015). The views of the army as a deteriorating institution gave way to an understanding that a functional army is necessary and its rejuvenation largely depends on the willingness of ordinary citizens to invest time and energy into its making.

Feminist scholars (Enloe 1983; 2000) link the social recognition of the military to the processes of societal militarisation whereby civilian modes of thinking and acting in the world become militarised. As female volunteers are the ones who discursively and materially advance the status of the military and celebrate men as defenders, they can be viewed as agents of social militarisation. Yet, the support for the military can be situational and contingent on the larger socio-political realities. For example, one my respondent, a female volunteer helping out at the hospital passionately asserted that she would not let her son to serve in the Ukrainian army because of poor army conditions and a lack of state support. She stated that she would welcome his military service in Israel where his father resides because of the prestige and state support associated with the military service there:

Yes, I am a patriot, but this is my son! If he joins our army, he will waste a year and a half of his life. This is if he stays alive! Nobody will help him to get into university. We will have to pay for it out of our pocket. I will send him to the army in Israel, but not our army! In Israel, everything is covered! You become a rightful member of your county. They create the conditions for you to advance. Here, there is only regress. Everything is falling apart. Only volunteers like myself keep it all together. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 5 July 2015)

This account points to the complexity of reconciling patriotic duties with personal (or familial) preoccupations and shows that they are often in tension with each other. While my respondent supports the military in principle and invest free labour into its functioning in Ukraine,

she resists the conscription of her son because of the poor treatment he would get there. My respondent feels that the state does not reciprocate adequately for the loyalty it demands from its conscripts. This testimony points to the conflictual tendencies that can unfold simultaneously. Through their care and support women can legitimize the army discursively and strengthen its functioning. At once, they can impede its operations locally through the sabotage of conscription because of unacceptable conditions of military service.

Changing power relations in volunteer communities

Analyzing the gendered logic of the masculine protector in relation to women, Young (2003) notes the hidden trade-off between women's safety and their rights. Drawing on patriarchal values, the representation of men as defenders puts women in subordinate position of dependence and obedience. Presenting the image of men as sacrificing and loving, especially in relation to women, the masculinist protection logic requires women to be grateful for offered protection and cooperate with the defenders to ensure safety from existing or imagined dangers. As Young points out, in order for men to be able to "protect," women have to distance themselves from decision-making. When danger is pending, "there cannot be divided wills and arguments about who will do what, or what the best course of action is. Protector "should decide what measures are necessary for the security of the people and he gives orders that they must follow if their relations are to remain safe" (Young 2003). Thus, the power to control the lives of women is acquired. Young notes that this type of power relies on the care of individuals, which gives it an appearance of benevolence and selfishness. Within this framework, female subordination becomes obscure and irrelevant and often happens with willingness and gratefulness on the part of those protected. The subordination of women is much more subtle in this case, because it does not occur through the means of overt aggressiveness and domination.

The depiction of men as main decision makers was present throughout my interviews. Some of my respondents related the “ability” or “right to decide” directly to the experience of warfare. As one of my respondents said: “Before I used to think that a woman could solve anything, but now I see that there are issues that should be solved by men. Men and women have separate spheres of responsibilities” (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs’k, 14 August 2015). Some of my respondents extended that logic of thinking to the politics more generally, saying that “politics is undeniably men’s business. I think men should get engaged in political affairs, because that’s what makes them into men. When women go into politics, it goes against their nature. Women have to support those men (in politics)”. There was an increased sense of obedience and solidarity that female volunteers felt towards men, where they “learned not to contradict,” and “support men in everything they do.” Some female volunteers noted that the experiences of wartime volunteering and interactions with soldiers have also impacted their familial relationships, increasing conformity and docility vis-à-vis their husbands. Yet another volunteer remarked:

The status of men and women in society changed. Both men and women became needed in the initially intended roles. Women became appreciated not as draught horses, housemaids and men became valued not as breadwinners. Those men who have been at war see women differently, as goddesses. The same goes for men. Their status has risen immensely. Men became men and women became women, and finally we are moving away from the stupid unhealthy feminism that has been forced on us for god knows what reasons (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs’k, 12 August 2015).

These testimonies are representative of the essentialist thinking that forecloses certain spaces in the public arena for women and results into a masculinisation of politics. They also illustrate that volunteer practices have not been seen as any kind of feminist engagement. On the contrary, female volunteers remarked that they are glad to move away from it and return to “normal” gender order where men and women are engaged in their “naturally” intended roles.

Women's compliance goes together with their subordination to men and accommodation of men's desires and interests. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) use the term "emphasized femininity" to describe the modes of femininity supportive of patriarchal dominance and women's subordination. As my research indicates, emphasized femininity has become more valued and central among those directly in touch with the realities of war – soldiers and volunteers, with men enjoying higher social status and women abiding by that. The traits of emphasized femininity are also visible in the ways female volunteers embrace newly acquired "true" masculinity of men and attune their behavior based on that. Reflecting on changing relationships between men and women, one volunteer went as far as saying: "I am starting to "turn on" a girl, "a blondie", with pouting lips. And I realised that I can be capricious too. Not to flirt with men. This is just because I am a girl. And they are boys. This distinction has surfaced in very significant ways recently" (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs'k, 17 August 2015). Even though this statement might not represent the general attitudes among women, the practices of feminising one's behavior, essentializing the difference between men and women to emphasize the need for protection were shared by many. Feminist scholars relate these tendencies with increase in men's authority to govern and dominate the public sphere.

There are also positive social and political effects related to women's engagement in volunteer work. Wartime engagement often resulted in transformations in women's life, making them much more engaged in the political and social life of the country. A story of Dalia Severyn, a war time volunteer who established a cooking sotnya in Odesa, is a good illustration of that. Dalia reported being "completely fixated on her private life, improving financial well-being or solving problems of relatives and close friends" before volunteering. She had no interest in politics and did not participate in the Maidan protests, preceding wartime mobilization. After she got

engaged with helping out the soldiers, her newly emerged network increased rapidly with many women joining the effort. Reflecting on that experience, she stated:

The success of my network shows that an ordinary person can create an organisation with over 1,000 activists and help over 30,000 soldiers in a span of a year. This is all thanks to the kindness and responsiveness of people who donated money for different items for the front. If an ordinary person like me could do it having no resources at hand, our politicians and businessmen should be able to do much more. The only difference is that I really wanted to save lives, filling in the needs of our soldiers (Fieldwork, Odesa, 14 July 2015).

As Dalia's example suggests, women have acquired new skills through volunteering, took up leadership positions in networks and became active participants in public life. Volunteering sites provide spaces for developing important professional connections and recruiting people into new projects and initiatives. Going back to the story of Dalia Severyn, I witnessed how new acquaintances took place in the context of volunteering. One such encounter with a volunteer fighter who came to Dalia's office in search of a ride back to the front turned into a professional cooperation after his military service came to end. After Dalia was appointed as head of the regional administration in Odesa, she hired her new acquaintance, with a law degree, as deputy head in her administration. Examples as this one are ample, demonstrating that female volunteers substantially extended their social networks that help them bring new projects into existence and take leadership positions in gender-mixed networks. There is a possibility that engagement outside of strict confines of volunteer work can lead to the reinterpretation of gender identities in a way that would create more space for women to participate in the spheres not traditionally associated with female labour. Snippets of that were visible during my fieldwork with a few of my respondents, both male and female, noting that they are not interested in politics themselves, but would gladly support female lead volunteers who proved their capacity and commitment through volunteer work.

During my fieldwork, however, I noted that women's understanding of their roles as supporters of men substantially shaped their engagement in broader initiatives and activism. Women predominantly occupied positions and spaces, traditionally associated with care and saw it as their major areas of responsibility. Female volunteers engaged in female-only protests to demand better conditions of military service and the recognition of combatants' rights and entitlements. One such example is the female-only protest held in July 2015 in Odesa against the appointment of Maria Gaidar, a Russian opposition activist, as Head of the Social Policy Department in Odesa region. Being strongly against a Russian citizen, who in a televised interview failed to call Russia an aggressor-state vis-à-vis Ukraine, to be a candidate running social functions in the region, female volunteers mobilized to contest this appointment in front of the Oblast State Administration. The call for protest was gender-charged, clearly indicating that female volunteers see social policy as their domain of responsibility (see Appendix, material 5.7). This and similar instances indicate that political activism of women has been limited in scope to the preoccupations of soldiers, their families and the military more generally and social concerns about IDPs.

Conclusion

In June 2015, the United Nations Population Fund in partnership with the Museum of Women's and Gender History, held the photo exhibit "Women and the Conflict in Ukraine" in Kharkiv. The exhibit set out to draw attention to the "female underside of war," bringing into light the contributions of women during the war on Donbas and deconstructing myths about their secondary role in what has been described as the fight for dignity and freedom of their country. Besides photo images portraying different undertakings of women at war, the framework of the exhibit also intended to create space where female volunteers could share their stories and experiences with a wider audience. One of the talks with a local female volunteer I attended gave

an impression of gender neutrality when it comes to volunteering. Answering a question on what it takes to become a volunteer, a guest speaker, a local female volunteer from Kharkiv, contended that anyone can engage, in any capacity. The commentary of a woman from the audience summarizes well the sentiments expressed during the event:

Today Ukraine has become the place where absolute gender equality has been achieved! This is a unique situation that never existed before. Those who are familiar with gender equality principles know that if Nadiya Savchenko has become the face of Ukraine, the formula of our Ukrainian character, this is gender equality at its purest!⁴¹ The questions about the role of women at war puzzle our speaker, because she accomplishes everything she sets out to do in her life. She finds it perplexing that, apparently, we live in a ‘patriarchal society’ and she should “know her place in it”! As a matter of fact, Ukraine is facing unique developments that will provide ample material for future dissertations on gender! (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 23 June 2015).⁴²

Based on my fieldwork, I come to conclusions that differ from this optimistic account of gender equality. Relying on interviews with volunteers and participant observation, I contend that a war-driven backstage mobilization has been occurring in Ukraine along the structures of gender relations that prescribe and reinforce distinctive roles to men as defenders and women as their carers. The predominantly male military service heightened women’s responsibilities as providers of support and comfort in the new reality of war. At the same time as men left to fight on the front, women rushed to get together to care for them. Since gender identities are not fixed or static, they get transformed through emerging practices and discourses. As a result of gender fluidity, some women adopted emphasized femininity that highlights the need for them “to be defended” and amplify the role of men as protectors.

⁴¹ Nadiya Savchenko is a former aviation pilot in the Ukrainian Ground Forces who was captured by the separatist forces and imprisoned in Russia in 2014. She became the “face of Ukraine” during her captivity, beginning a hunger strike to protest her illegal detention. She was subsequently exchanged as prisoner of war

⁴² A video recording of the interview can be accessed at <http://www.cultura.kh.ua/ru/news/4073-u-harkovi-vidbulasja-zustrich-z-volonterkoju-katerinoju-jaresko-v-ramkah-proektu-vidkriti-intervju> (U Kharkovi Vidbulas’ 2015)

As feminist scholars note, hegemonic masculinities and femininities are plural, local and power-laden. One implication of this is that the findings of this study cannot be easily generalized to the entire population in Ukraine. I studied the reordering of gender identities in volunteer communities that have been operating along gendered lines. As female volunteers were faced with the precarity of soldiers, they took it upon themselves to support them emotionally and practically. This, in turn, led to the celebration of men in relation to the military and positioned women as guardians of combatants. For many, this type of gendered solidarities “normalised” gender relations and signified a shift to “natural” order of things. In other sites, however, the ordering of gender identities might have occurred differently. As stated, the engagement of female fighters on the front might contest the understanding of military service as the prerogative of men. The presence of female fighters might challenge the conceptions of women as supporters and position them as active actors in the military. It can open a possibility for different forms of solidarities to take root and strengthen. The profound social and political transformations amidst war tend to unleash complex and often contradictory processes of identity reordering, calling for more studies to be conducted. These studies should take into account the localized aspects of identity formation and the ways local conceptions interact with broader discourses about social worthiness in times of war.

Feminist scholars also keep us alert against the tendency to simplify and reify the experiences of combatants and war veterans. Particularly, they stress that “military masculinity” should not be treated as an identity, but rather a set of norms and practices that guide one’s behavior and attitudes. Analytically, these scholars draw attention to the possibility of *unmaking* “militarised masculinity” and corresponding mode of femininity. Attention should be directed towards the possibilities and mechanisms of such *unmaking*. In the context of Ukraine, some seeds

of dislodging militarised masculinity could be seen in relation to the ambiguity of war itself. Contestations over the status of combatants as “heroes” and the social condemnation from familial, social and professional circles might present an opening for displacing militarised masculinities. Studies should be done to understand how the newly acquired experience of combat and war influences men’s lives after demobilization. As demobilization and demilitarisation are distinctive processes that do not necessarily occur concomitantly, we have to study how war veterans adjust to peaceful environments and what implications it has for the understanding of who counts as a legitimate member of the community and nation, on what grounds and to what effects for power relations in Ukraine.

Chapter 6. National identity formation amidst war: “We came to see ourselves as a nation now”

Not that my parents were anti-Ukrainian or anything... It's just that the word “Ukraine” has become resonant only now. I understood what “Ukraine” means only recently! Before, it was just a territory where I lived. Lots of my family members served in the military. My father's brother lives in Artsysk region [Southern Ukraine] and all three of his daughters got married with military servicemen, some of them from Russia, Omsk region. We were all friends. You know, I didn't think of myself as Ukrainian back then and I didn't think of this country as Ukraine. We were ready to fraternize with everyone and give away anything they asked for... This was the Soviet mentality, Soviet upbringing. We were taught to love these abstractions, the Soviet Union... Now, when I think about it, I realize that I was attached to my parents, my apartment and that's it! I am 50 years old now and it's only now that I realized who I am, that this is my land, the land of my children. It's all very emotional and painful for me, because so many people were killed over the last year for us to clearly understand where we belong. Previous 50 years of my life were wasted. Those past ways of thinking have no value, but my newly acquired understanding and appreciation of Ukraine is very pure and strong. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 15 June 2015)

Like Tatiana, many Ukrainians have recently strengthened their identification with Ukraine, its culture and history. Social and academic commentators alike have celebrated this newly acquired sense of Ukrainian-ness. The general understanding is that the social, political and military upheaval – including EuroMaidan protests, the annexation of Crimea and war on Donbas – has “united” Ukrainians, prompting “the crystallization” and “institutionalization” of national identity while erasing other forms of identification.

While there is general agreement that many people substantially revised their national identities as a result of the war, these changes have not been thoroughly theorized. Drawing on fieldwork I did in Ukraine, in this chapter I show how participants in the war effort, specifically volunteers, altered their national identification. I suggest war, violence and dislocation forged new solidarities and loyalties, sharpening the boundaries of belonging around Ukraine and away from Russia. This accompanies the erasure of localism, regional particularism, pan-Slavism and

Sovietness in volunteering communities, all of which were defining features of Ukraine's pre-war social and political landscape.

I then draw on and extend Anderson's (2006) work on nationalism which, among other things, posits that a unified field of communication and exchange is key to the formation of national consciousness. I go beyond Anderson to demonstrate that unified fields of communication and exchange are not limited to language use, but can be produced through wartime interaction and mobility – the dynamics that provide space for “situated learning” of national identities. In Ukraine, war-induced disruptions and needs generated an intensive inter-regional cooperation, subsequently reducing perceived cultural differences among volunteers from different regions and increasing cohesion and unity. Through volunteering, my respondents became more invested in Ukrainian culture, language and history and found new outlets for fostering their newly acquired interests. Many attuned their cultural and linguistic practices to reflect their heightened identification with Ukraine.

This chapter is divided into three parts. First, it reviews different national identity complexes existing in Ukraine before the Donbas war. Drawing on fieldwork, it then shows how war and volunteering experiences affected volunteers' national identities. The third section looks at inter-regional wartime socializing and its impact on national identities. Simply stated, I found that national identification with Ukraine became the main frame of reference for volunteers who previously identified themselves differently and showed little interest in Ukrainian culture and history.

National identity complexes in Ukraine before the war on Donbas

Since acquiring its independence in 1991, Ukraine has been characterized as a politically unstable state with deep regional divisions (Shulman 1998; 2004; Arel 2006; D'Anieri

2007). There is overall consensus among scholars that the country is divided along ethno-linguistic and cultural lines. Although the importance of these categories, their origins, and their territorial confines have been widely debated (Birch 2000; Arel 2006; Barrington and Faranda 2009), their political saliency has been noticeable in voting patterns and oppositional political orientations rooted in regionalism. Scholars attribute the regions' divergent preferences to historical, economic and demographic factors.

Historically, the experience of conquest, settlement and displacement has varied greatly across Ukraine. Throughout the centuries, different parts of contemporary Ukraine have belonged to different spheres of geo-political influence. For example, three historical regions in Western Ukraine — Galicia, Transcarpathia and Bukovyna — were integrated in the Habsburg Empire. After the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, Galicia joined Poland, Transcarpathia became part of Czechoslovakia, and Bukovyna was integrated into Romania. In 1944, after the retreat of Germany, all were occupied by the Soviet Union. However, they continued to develop differently from the rest of Ukraine. Birch (2000) notes that as part of the Habsburg Empire, Galicia had a chance to vote in popular elections and interact with democratic institutions from 1861 until 1939, when it was annexed by the Soviet Union. She argues that the exposure to competitive politics had two distinctive effects: shaping the electoral culture in the predominantly rural region and giving it an “ethnic” flavour. The importance of ethnicity in the region's electoral politics had to do with the fact that electoral allegiances under the Habsburg Empire were formed along ethnic lines. Birch argues that Western Ukraine managed to maintain a participatory political culture through the Soviet rule, as they were more capable of political contestation and activism.

The historical experiences of Eastern and Southern Ukraine were completely different, partly because these regions were under Russian rule for much longer. Eastern Ukraine, including

Dnipropetrovs'k and Kharkiv, had the longest experience of Russian rule, becoming part of the Russian Empire in 1654 under the Pereyaslav Treaty. Southern Ukraine, previously part of the Ottoman Empire, found itself under Russian domination in the 19th century. Both Odesa and Dnipropetrovs'k were part of the Novorossiia (New Russia) project envisioned as a Westward expansion of the Russian Empire in the late 18th century. Both Southern and Eastern Ukraine underwent rapid settlement and industrialization in the late 19th century as the Russian Empire pursued its colonization project. While the population increased seven-fold (Birch 2000), mostly through migration flows from Russia, the development of Ukrainian language and culture was severely restricted. This resulted in a heavy Russification of the region, with most of the population speaking Russian as the preferred language to this day. In sum, these regions have had longer affiliation with Russia, less affinity with the West, more exposure to communism, and a different ethno-linguistic composition.

Economically, Eastern Ukraine is the most industrialized part of the country. Donbas, consisting of Donets'k and Luhans'k oblasts, has been an important coal mining center since the late 19th century, when it became the first heavily industrialized territory of the Russian Empire. It maintained that status throughout the Soviet period. The provinces of Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovs'k also belong to the industrial zone. Kharkiv became one of the major industrial cities of the Soviet Union, specializing in machinery and electronics. For its part, Dnipropetrovs'k was a key center for the Soviet nuclear, arms and space industries; for example, it was the site of the Soviet bloc's largest missile factory, Yuzhmash. Because of its military industry, it remained a closed city until the 1990s. Odesa, a major seaport, also had special standing, as it was considered the "South Capital" under both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.

The question of ethnic belonging in Ukraine is complex and deserves additional

attention. As Pirie (1996) notes, biological conceptions of ethnicity are prevalent in Ukraine as they are in other countries. Ethnicity is considered fixed at birth and has a profound effect on the way people think of themselves. Yet the widespread ethnic mixing through marriage in Eastern and Southern regions of Ukraine can make it difficult for individuals in those areas to identify as belonging to a single ethnic group. Ethnic intermarriage – often regarded as the mixing of blood – became increasingly common across Ukraine during Soviet rule, as it was considered a way to fuse the various peoples of the Soviet Union (Pirie 1996: 1082). As Pirie indicates, fewer than three percent of all Ukrainian marriages were mixed ones before the Soviet period, with a slightly higher percentage on Donbas (seven percent). Over the 60 years of Soviet rule, the number of intermarriages increased sevenfold, reaching 30.1 percent in 1979. The rate on Donbas considerably exceeded the average, reaching 55 percent in the 1970s. The occurrence of intermarriages in Southern Ukraine was still slightly over the national average, at 39 percent; the number in the Northeast (Kharkiv) was comparable at 36 percent. Birth registration records confirm the high levels of mixed ethnic marriages in the Southeastern areas. In the early 1990s, almost 50 percent of all children born in the Donets'k oblast had parents of different passport nationalities (Pirie 1996). A survey conducted in 1991 found that in Eastern Ukraine, 73 percent of residents claiming a Russian nationality declared that they had close relatives who were Ukrainians (ibid).

Considering the ethnic intermixing and the complex linguistic situation in Eastern and Southern regions, the usage of exclusive ethnic categories does not capture the ways people ethnically identify themselves. Many have difficulty clearly delineating their ethnicity; they create complex ways of articulating their belonging, not necessarily in ethnic terms. Pirie (1996) outlines four possible routes for people to take if they belong to two ethnic communities simultaneously.

The first strategy is a straightforward identification with only one ethnicity. In such cases, individuals with mixed parentage decisively choose the ethnic identity of their mother or father and consider themselves mono-ethnic. The second is to adopt a strong identification with both ethnic communities, with people seeing themselves as bi-cultural and bi-lingual. In this instance, an individual develops a dual identity and operates freely in both cultures. The third option is to abandon or marginalise ethnic identification altogether, displaying ambivalence towards or rejection of both ethnic groups. As Pirie notes, this “ethnic nihilism” is especially common among individuals with membership in two hostile ethnic groups. As a coping mechanism, they abandon ethnic identification and call themselves “cosmopolitan”. Pirie says this type of identification is the least stable and can fluctuate greatly throughout the life course. The final category includes those individuals who find ways to reconcile two ethnic identities under an over-arching “pan-identity”. Unlike marginal identification, a “pan-identity” can indicate a strong allegiance while reducing the internal tension of belonging to two separate ethnic groups.

The complexity of ethnic intermixing and belonging was revealed in my interviews of war volunteers. To the question “What do you consider yourself by nationality?” the following types of responses were common:

You know, in Odesa nationalities are very mixed. I am Russian, my mother is from Odesa, but my grandmother is from Ivanovo (Russia). My father is Russian, but he was born in Yerevan. My grandfather is Armenian. I have no Ukrainian lineage, but I consider myself Ukrainian. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 7 July 2015).

I am from Odesa, but I don't have any Ukrainian blood in me, not even a drop! My grandparents were in the military. The military in the Soviet times was always on the move. One of my grandfathers is Belarusian, another one is from Russia, from Siberia, just like my grandmother. As military personnel, they were relocated and settled in Odesa (Fieldwork, Odesa, 15 July 2015)

My husband is ethnically mixed – Ukrainian and Polish. He was born in Donets’k region. Territorially, we were all born in Ukraine, but ethnically it’s very mixed – we have Russians, Belarusians, Jews, Georgians and Armenians here. Everything is mixed up here, but we are all territorial Ukrainians. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs’k, 8 August 2015)

Most of my respondents were Russian-speaking Ukrainians. Many claimed mixed ethnic lineage with relatives living in Russia or former republics of the Soviet Union. At the outset of war, they exhibited an uneven degree of identification with Ukraine, something that changed in the course of volunteering. Scholars of regionalism (Arel 2006; Birch 2000; Barrington and Faranda 2009) agree that ethnicity by itself has little power to explain the ways people identify themselves in Ukraine. Before the war on Donbas, it was necessary to look at ethno-linguistic markers and the region of residence to get a better picture of national identification markers and political preferences across different regions of Ukraine.

While there are several classificatory schemes to understand regional cultures across Ukraine, Shulman (2004) suggests they are indicative of two national identification complexes. The first, “ethnic Ukrainian identity,” is prominent in Western and Central Ukraine. Adherents are pro-Western. Their language preference is Ukrainian. They perceive Russia as the cultural “other”, seeing close cultural and economic ties with Russia as threatening to Ukrainian statehood. The second version of national identity is “Eastern Slavic”. Adherents generally live in Eastern and Southern Ukraine. They had pro-Russian orientations in terms of trade and cooperation and culturally identified with Russia. Their language of preference is Russian, and they see the West as the cultural “other”. As Shulman (1998) notes, they do not see tension in being Russian speakers and also Ukrainian, feeling an attachment to both Russia and Ukraine. Shulman (1998) concluded that in Ukraine multiple loyalties and identities coexisted with most Ukrainian nationalists feeling distrustful towards Russified Ukrainians and ethnic Russians, but ultimately these identities were not competitive and could coexist within one state.

Looking at the changes in national identification among volunteer communities, the subsequent section illustrates how previously complementary loyalties to Ukraine and Russia or pan-ethnic identification as “Slavs” became impossible under the conditions of war. Defining Russia as the aggressor state, many of my respondents came to disassociate themselves with it, strengthening identification with Ukraine instead.

Rethinking national identities amidst war

Defining the ‘Other’: Russia as ‘the aggressor state’

As noted in the theory chapter, the construction of difference plays an important role in fostering and strengthening national imaginings. The war on Donbas became a catalyst through which the difference between Ukraine and Russia was amplified, giving way to a more coherent articulation of “the other”. To explain this process, I draw on my respondents’ references to “turning points” in their attitudes towards Russia and show how they dissociated themselves from Russia and the Soviet Union, strengthening their identification with Ukraine. While some events, like the annexation of Crimea, are verifiable and real, others, like the presence of Russia’s troops in specific locations, at specific times or in specific numbers, are hard to confirm. The credibility of my respondents is not the primary focus here, however. I am more interested in how they form their opinions, assign meaning to the world around them and act upon their perceptions, changing their frames of reference when it comes to belonging and identification.

Crimea

One of the events constantly referenced by my respondents was the annexation of Crimea. The Russian-organized illegal referendum on the status of Crimea resulted in the annexation of the peninsula in March 2014. Since then, Crimea has been administered as a de-facto Russian subject with pro-Ukrainian supporters facing persecution, arrests and displacement.

For Tanya, an ethnic Russian living in Ukraine for over 20 years and holding Ukrainian citizenship, the annexation was especially traumatic. She was born and raised in Grozny, Chechnya, and finished her vocational training in a college there. In 1988, she relocated to Odesa to work at the oil refinery. Tanya was in Odesa, taking care of her daughter, when the first Chechen War started. Her father was killed in the war and her mother fled violence. The takeover of Crimea brought back the panic experienced by Tanya back during the First Chechen War:

Everything that has to do with Russia makes me panic! [When the annexation of Crimea was taking place], I remember I was constantly checking the internet at work, every minute. Right away, I knew what was going on. It was a nightmare! I knew there would be a war! I didn't know what to do with myself. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 25 July 2015)

Tanya sees the annexation of the peninsula as a great injustice, “inexcusable behavior” by Putin’s Russia. Her sense of injustice pushed Tanya to find a volunteering venue. She felt she had to help; it’s wrong to attack another country, she said, “especially if you are a powerful state with large territories and enormous capabilities. It’s wrong to use the force against the weak. Not only in politics. It’s wrong!”

Many of my respondents echoed this sentiment, expressing shock and frustration with the unjust annexation of Crimea. Volunteers were appalled by the blunt aggression of Russia, the imposition of its rule and way of life onto Ukrainians. “I was utterly outraged by Russia invading my country and forcing itself upon us”, remarked a volunteer from Odesa.

The feeling of injustice was exacerbated by the justification of aggression, whereby Russia allegedly intervened to protect Russian-speaking populations (*sootechestvinniki*) in Ukraine. All my Russian-speaking respondents protested that they never felt threatened or discriminated against based on their language choice and found the justification absurd and hypocritical, masking “Russia’s true intentions of invasion”. Tanya said recent events made her

feel ashamed of her Russian nationality and strengthened her identification with Ukraine:

I was very ashamed when it all started. I couldn't even say out loud that I am Russian. It's horrible. I know other people of Russian nationality who feel the same way... When I listen to Putin's speeches about Russian being a titular nationality – my blood boils! How can one person take it upon himself to proclaim one nation as superior and use it as presence for invasion? (Fieldwork, Odesa, 25 July 2015)

Commenting on her attachment to Ukraine, Tanya said that she is ethnically Russian, but she considers herself Ukrainian too. She remarked that the attachment to Ukraine was present even before the annexation of Crimea and hostilities on Donbas. Residing in Ukraine since the late 1980s and establishing her family and professional life there made her identify with Ukraine. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tanya received Ukrainian citizenship - as did all those residing in Ukraine at the time. She later strengthened her connection to Ukraine by marrying an ethnic Ukrainian and giving birth to a child “who is a true Ukrainian”.

Tanya's differentiated belonging – to an ethnic group (Russian nationality) and territorial nationhood (Ukraine) – has to do with the ways nationhood was institutionalized in the Soviet Union. Brubaker (1996) explains that while Soviet officials aimed at creating a multiethnic state, they unintentionally entrenched two forms of nationhood based on ethnicity and territory, making them fundamental social categories of differentiation. First, the Soviet regime divided the Soviet state into national territories, endowing each with cultural and linguistic institutions to secure their loyalty. These national territories were defined as homelands for particular ethnonational groups, thus institutionalizing nationhood in territorial and political terms. Second, the regime divided the citizenry into a set of exhaustive and mutually exclusive ethnic nationalities and made ethnic nationality an obligatory ascribed status (Brubaker 1996:18). This status was recorded in almost all bureaucratic encounters and official transactions. It was also used to access certain services, education, and desirable jobs through preferential treatment policies for so-called

“titular” nationalities in their own republics.

In this way, nationhood was institutionalized in cultural and territorial terms. This dual institutionalization of nationhood was rife with tensions and contradictions, Brubaker states, because the citizens of different nationalities did not exclusively reside in “their titular republics” (1996: 37). At the time of the 1989 census, more than 73 million Soviet citizens – a quarter of the total Soviet population – lived outside “their own” national territories (ibid:37). The lack of congruence between the territorial and ethnic frames of nationhood mattered for bureaucratic dealings of citizens with the Soviet State; they also came to frame cognitive and emotional modes of belonging in the Soviet Union.

As Tanya’s example illustrates, Russian nationality (ethnic belonging) became less meaningful to her over time, while territorial nationhood acquired more significance. This attachment became solidified amidst the unfolding war on Donbas as Tanya was appalled by Russia’s aggression. She also struggled to stay connected to her relatives and acquaintances in Russia amidst the political and military upheavals. Frustration over their support of Crimea annexation and their resentment of her pro-Ukrainian stance alienated her: “At this point, I can’t even visit my relatives, because they tell me to “get out with your Ukrainian flags and volunteer work from here.” The ties with Russia have been irreparably damaged, she concluded. The disassociation with Russia goes in tandem with Tanya’s increased interest in Ukraine’s history, culture and traditions, something addressed elsewhere in this chapter.

Other respondents also felt traumatized by Russia’s annexation of Crimea and recounted stories of suffering, injustice and precarity experienced in its aftermath. My respondent Alla, a Belarusian national born and raised in Crimea, gained a new appreciation of Ukraine and a strong disdain for Russia after going through a series of painful events related to her husband’s work for

the Ukrainian Navy in Crimea, her own work as Ukrainian teacher at a Crimean school and their relocation to Odesa amidst annexation:

It all started with the intimidation and threats of pro-Ukrainian military families. They knew everything about us – where everyone works, what schools our children go to. Then the seizure of Ukrainian ships began and my husband with the rest of the crew ended up besieged on one of the Ukrainian ships... We had no idea how things would unfold and whether the crew would survive. Eventually, the crew was forced out of the ship, leaving all personal belongings behind. Soon after, my husband fled to Odesa and I followed him a couple of months later. When we were crossing the border from Crimea to mainland Ukraine – I can't even tell you how I felt! I asked the driver to stop the car for a minute. I wanted to kiss the soil. I had a feeling that my motherland is being taken away from me. My land is taken away (crying). I spent my whole life in Crimea and had to leave... In the context of these horrible events, I became a true patriot of my country. Our life drastically changed...nothing is the same for us... and in this situation, I became a big patriot. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 24 July 2015)

Clearly, the traumatic experiences of intimidation, violence and dislocation had a profound effect on the way Alla saw Russia: “Russians are enemies for me. For the rest of my life. Even more so for my husband, especially considering that one of his classmates was killed in this war.” Some of my respondents felt a strong sense of resentment towards Russia as a result of this aggression and revised their attitudes to Russia accordingly. Identification with Ukraine changed as well as they came to feel a strengthened sense of belonging and loyalty in the midst of injustice and aggression. These accounts suggest that the annexation of Crimea had a “splitting effect” (Smelser 2004) whereby political polarization between the opposing sides occurs. The process of splitting requires both sides to more rigidly define “us” and “them”, “othering” the opponents and increasing solidarity with like-minded people and the state.

Duma vote

Whereas some found the annexation of Crimea completely unacceptable, others focused on the subsequent events that positioned Russia in a similar light - as an aggressor and enemy. The

Duma vote that was one of the shocking developments my respondents brought up. On 1 March 2014, the Upper House of the Russian Parliament unanimously approved President Vladimir Putin's request to send Russian military forces to Ukraine. The Kremlin said the move was done "in connection with the extraordinary situation in Ukraine and the threat to the lives of Russian citizens" (Russian Parliament 2014). Commenting on the decision, Ladia, a volunteer from Kharkiv, said it raised numerous questions about Russia's involvement in Ukraine and made her realize for the first time that Russia was at war with Ukraine:

The Duma's permission to deploy Russian troops in Ukraine "to stabilize the situation", so to say, was a shock, a turning point for me. My whole family was watching that Duma session live. Back then, I realized for the first time that it's a war. I wasn't following politics very closely before, but that event was out of ordinary. It was a beginning of war. For our family, it raised a question of what do to? A very practical question that borne out and crystallized our identification with Ukraine. We asked ourselves: "What are we going to do? Where are we going to flee? Are we going to flee at all?" (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 8 June 2015)

Like many other Ukrainians, the question of belonging was a complex one for Ladia's family. Her husband is an ethnic Russian, while she was born and schooled in Donetsk. As Ladia explained, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, part of Ukraine remained in the liminal post-Soviet space. Her family did not see themselves a "Soviet people" any more, and her husband didn't feel any attachment to Russia. They both received Ukrainian passports after Ukraine's independence and had Ukrainian citizenship, but their identification with Ukraine was weak, with little meaning attached to it. The weak and ambiguous identification characterized the life of their family before the war.

Russia's aggression changed this, forcing Ladia and her family to clearly articulate their loyalty to Ukraine and act upon it: "For me, the question was not whether we should support Russia, but what is it that we should do for Ukraine if anything?" - she recalled. The accompanying events in Kharkiv, with people beaten up for their pro-Ukrainian stance, convinced Ladia that she

should stay in the city and become actively engaged in the efforts to defend Ukraine. The events unfolding in Eastern Ukraine only strengthened this conviction, making Ladia committed to wartime volunteering and working not to allow the violence to split to her hometown. Her story, like many of the other accounts I heard, shows a Ukrainian national consciousness forming in response to a feeling of injustice, with Ukrainians seeing recent events as an attack on their culture, language and way of life and defining their loyalties in response to that.⁴³

Reported Evidence of Russia's Military Presence on Donbas

In my conversations with volunteers, I recorded many stories about Russia's military engagement in Ukraine. Volunteers emphasized Russian aggression and responded angrily to suggestions of a Ukrainian civil war. They recounted their personal experiences of travelling back and forth to the front lines and encountering signs of Russian engagement on Donbas; they also told stories second-hand – what happened to soldiers they knew, for example, or the experiences of displaced residents of Donbas. The following two excerpts are typical:

I recently met a woman from Donets'k. She says that streets there are filled with Russian military equipment, including rocket launchers, mortars and missiles. Donets'k is packed with that! Another woman from Gorlivka told me that she heard Russian heavy armour being transferred to Donets'k. The operation lasted for eight hours! They were transferring this heavy weaponry through Gorlivka to Donets'k for eight hours! (Fieldwork, Odesa, IDP volunteer from Luhans'k, 20 July 2015)

I spent hours and hours trying to explain people that it's not a civil war here in Ukraine! What kind of civil war is it if we have thousands of tanks around? Did the so-called rebels purchase those tanks on the flea market? I can understand how one can purchase weapons illegally, but tanks? In those numbers? (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 12 June 2015)

In Odesa and Kharkiv, volunteers set up displays of military artifacts to document and

⁴³ According to a survey, 83 percent of Ukrainians condemn the Duma vote that approved President Vladimir Putin's request to send Russian military forces to Ukraine. The survey indicates the presence of regional variations regarding the vote (Kiev International 2014b)

raise awareness of Russia's military involvement. The displays included parts of Russian military equipment, mortars and other weapons brought by volunteers or combatants from the front lines. Images were labelled "Russian weapons in the hands of Donbas rebels," and captions on photos read, "Soldiers who sacrificed their life for Ukraine's Independence in the Russian-Ukrainian War" (S'ohodni v Odesi 2015, see also Photos 6.1 and 6.2).

Many of the volunteers I interviewed were frustrated that, technically speaking, the war on Donbas was not officially classified as a war. Legally, the military campaign was termed an 'anti-terrorist operation' (ATO) in Eastern Ukraine. Volunteers felt this misrepresented the nature of the violence on Donbas and masked Russia's role. A volunteer from Dnipropetrovs'k voiced a sentiment I heard from many volunteers:

Let's call things what they are. Let's call a war – a war, not an anti-terrorist operation. Let's call Russia not an ambiguous meddler, but an enemy that annexed part of our territory. We lost Crimea and two of our provinces [oblasts] have an unclear status. How many more oblasts do we have to lose for us to acknowledge that there is an enemy ready to occupy our lands? We are at war. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs'k, 26 August 2015)

Many of my respondents indicated that their attitudes towards Russia had become increasingly negative. Some said they previously felt indifferent towards Russia and its politics. Recent events had caused them to rethink things: "I didn't care about Russia at all. I didn't care whether it still exists or not. Now, I do care! I hate that country. All they achieved is hatred towards themselves. I don't wish them well. I have become much more radical in my opinions", remarked a respondent in Odesa.

While some volunteers made no distinction between the Russian people and the Russian government, most were more nuanced in their attitudes, differentiating between the state, the government and Russians more generally. One said, "Like most Ukrainians, I don't have any problems with Russians. I have problems with the Putin's regime. Ordinary people have little to

do with it and I have no grudges against them”. Some said they understood those living in Russia and exposed to Russian propaganda but were profoundly disillusioned by pro-Russian Ukrainians “who stayed in Crimea, cheering the deaths and suffering of their own compatriots”.

Many of my respondents reported cutting social, familial and professional ties with those living in Russia who supported Russia’s actions in Ukraine: “I stopped communicating with my Russian relatives and I have quite a few of them! All my dad’s family lives in Russia. I used to have lots of friends and acquaintances there. I have kept in touch only with one of them. He is from St. Petersburg. We are close friends and he understands well what’s going on here”, said a volunteer from Odesa.

Iryna, a business woman and a volunteer from Dnipropetrovs’k, said she refused to rent office space to companies with Russian suppliers. “There is no negotiation around this”, she added. “If the person has business partnerships with Russia, I don’t want him as my client”. Iryna found it unacceptable to maintain regular business relations with Russia and financially benefit from these dealerships, while the war in Ukraine remained unresolved, with thousands of Ukrainians killed and over a million displaced. She believed that business interests should not overshadow the interests of the Ukrainian state and Ukrainians. “It is always possible to find alternative suppliers and I can’t condone people keeping business ties with Russia out of mere monetary gain”. Like Iryna, a few other volunteers noted breaking off contracts with Russian partners or halting joint projects because of the war on Donbas. Some said their cooperation with Russian partners stalled because of the economic circumstances. None expressed interest in renewing broken business relations or seeking new opportunities.

Generally speaking, many of my respondents re-evaluated their past and future relations with Russia. Looking through a war-imposed lens, some noted that Ukraine was always used by

Russia for its own economic and political benefits, with Russia “being at our throats, forcing us to accept their way throughout history”. Others said Ukrainians and Russians have different worldviews and visions for their countries’ respective futures. Russia has become increasingly associated with economic backwardness, authoritarianism, and Soviet-style propaganda, whereas Ukraine’s future has been conceptualized as breaking away from the Soviet legacy and moving towards the European Union or carving out a unique path for development. “I want Ukraine to be independent and prosperous outside of the former Soviet Union or Eurasian Union as Putin envisions it”, remarked one of my respondents.

Recent events had made my respondents treat Ukraine and Russia as separate entities, each driven by its own interests and politics. As a result of the Crimea annexation and Donbas hostilities, Russia was seen as “an aggressor state” threatening the existence of Ukrainian statehood and the ways of life dear to my respondents and endangering Ukraine’s prospects for a decent future. The reconstruction of relations between Russia and Ukraine went beyond the war with my respondents reinterpreting historic events in view of the recent developments. The positioning of Russia as an aggressor state became a symbolic unifying discourse for those engaged in volunteer effort, making my respondents identify with Ukraine to a higher degree and forging new forms of belonging. Surveys (Kiev International 2015) point that these processes are not specific to volunteer communities with an increased percentage of Ukrainians across all regions seeing Russia in the more negative light than they used to. Regional differences, however, remain to exist with residents of Eastern and Southern regions showing higher positive attitudes towards Russia compared to the Western and Central Ukraine (Kiev International 2015).

New forms of (dis)belonging

Breaking with the Soviet past

As part of disassociating from Russia, my respondents re-evaluated their attitudes and attachment to the former Soviet Union. As previously noted, Soviet identity was articulated in the 1960s and 1970s to fuse different ethnic communities and decrease tensions. While some scholars remain skeptical of its capacity to supersede national identification (Brubaker 1996), surveys conducted in post-Soviet republics, including Ukraine, indicate that Soviet identity became meaningful to many Soviet citizens (Wolczuk 2000). In many ways, the personal trajectories of Soviet citizens became inextricably linked with Soviet history and culture, with Soviet identity becoming a cognitive and emotional frame of reference for many.

Oushakine (2009) shows that the disarray following the collapse of the Soviet Union did not automatically generate new forms of belonging and identity, with many ex-Soviets experiencing a crisis of identity and others feeling nostalgic for the lost ways of life. Many remained attached to the individual and collective achievements, ways of life and forms of belonging propagated by the Soviet Union. For example, Laitin (1998) notes that during ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Ukraine in the 1990s, his team of researchers frequently encountered the seriousness of Russian-speakers' attachment to a Soviet identity. He found the feelings of nostalgia for the Soviet Union went beyond sentiment, so much so that he defines them as important identity markers (Laitin 1998).

The memories of the Soviet Union remained meaningful for many of my respondents until the outbreak of war on Donbas. Take Vadym, a volunteer from Dnipropetrovs'k, as an example. He was born in the Soviet Union (territorially in Ukraine). He was a Soviet pioneer during his school years and then a young communist (komsomolets). He served in the Soviet Army and lived in "the mighty Soviet Union spreading wide across the lands", as he put it. Reflecting on

his past attachment, Vadym stated: “I guess... after Ukraine’s independence I still had “Soviet pride” of us being the largest state everyone feared. These illusions were difficult to part ways with. For many years, they stayed with me, somewhere deep in my heart.” The war on Donbas erased Vadym’s longing for Sovietness and old ways of life: “After the recent events, I realized that I’d never be able to live in the state that unites Ukraine and Russia as one entity. I just can’t. I buried a few of my close friends, personally organized funerals for them... After this, reconciling and coming together with Russia is impossible”. Thinking about the possibility of another union between Ukraine and Russia, Vadym concluded that uniting with Russia might be possible for future generations “if something drastically changes over the next few decades and a favourable environment for a new union forms. If the world changes and presents us with a common enemy – we might unite. But I see myself as a citizen of Ukraine”.

Vadym’s attachment to the Soviet past and the sudden rupture with it was echoed by other volunteers, including members of the younger generation. A story told by Iryna, a 37-year-old volunteer from Odesa, expressed the change in identification:

I am ethnically Bulgarian, but I never thought in those terms before. I was born in the Soviet Union. Even though it collapsed when I was a child, I still got to spend the first 12 years of my life there. It was enough to shape my ways of thinking. Plus, my parents and their friends talked about the Soviet Union a lot. It was common space for me – Russia and Ukraine. I never had any questions in that regard. The question of nationality was never raised: are you a citizen of Ukraine? Would you like to be a citizen of Russia?! We never discussed it. I had a Ukrainian passport just because the Soviet Union happened to split that way. It never raised any issues with us. The problem arose when Russia decided to dictate their terms to us. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 12 July 2015)

As her comments make clear, Iryna had weak pan-ethnic identification with both Ukraine and Russia, not clearly delineating between the two states. She also had a marginal attachment to her ethnic identity as Bulgarian. As Pirie (1996) explains, marginal identification with two or more ethnic groups is a coping strategy for individuals who have multiple allegiances.

In Iryna's case, marginal pan-ethnic identification served to reduce tensions between her ethnic belonging (Bulgarian), cultural markers (Russian language and culture) and territorial belonging (Ukraine). Before the war, Iryna reconciled multiple belongings through the idea of "common space" within which all sides of her identification could co-exist. The hostilities rendered the inclusive form of identification impossible, making Iryna stress her Ukrainian identity over others. Iryna said the line separating Ukraine and Russia was clear now, with no "common space" and no "brotherly nations".

Among my respondents, the disassociation with a Soviet identity and the disappearance of "common space" included the erasure of cultural practices associated with the Soviet Union. Some said they discontinued the celebration of holidays that originated in the Soviet Union. Among others, the Defender of the Fatherland Day, marked annually on February 23, now had much less significance for volunteer communities. The holiday was established in the Soviet Union in 1919 to commemorate the first mass draft into the Red Army. With Ukraine's independence, it retained cultural significance, coming to celebrate men's courage and military service more generally. But it is clearly associated with the Soviet legacy and Russia, and some volunteers noted their resentment of it, a feeling exacerbated by the fact that Defender Day is close to the shootings of EuroMaidan protestors in Kiev on 18-20 February 2014. Discussions of the appropriateness of maintaining Soviet traditions and practices were common among volunteers, with most agreeing Soviet holidays are relics of the past.

As my respondents' stories demonstrate, the war in Eastern Ukraine put an end to nostalgic memories of Soviet culture and identity among some who previously identified with the Soviet space. For them, a strong identification with Ukraine now superseded a pan-ethnic identity, and volunteers of different nationalities thought of themselves as Ukrainian.

From being a Luhans'kite to being Ukrainian

While pan-ethnic Soviet identification appealed to some Ukrainians, others strongly identified with their locales of residence. Testing the limits of the nation's inner cohesion in Ukraine, scholars of regionalism observe that many people in Eastern and Southern Ukraine have a very strong attachment to their home cities or regions. For example, a study by Hrytsak (1998) in L'viv and Donets'k – two cities diverging in their ethno-linguistic composition and political orientation – reveals that in Eastern Ukraine (Donets'k in particular), gender and regional identities take precedence over any other types of identities, including national and class identification. Over 55 percent of respondents from Donets'k said they saw themselves as Donets'kite compared to 40 percent who said they embraced a Soviet identity; 39.3 percent and 30 percent identified with Ukraine and Russia, respectively. Hrytsak contrasts these results to findings in L'viv in Western Ukraine, where over 70 percent of respondents saw themselves as Ukrainians before anything else. A study conducted in 1996 also found regional identity was prominent, with 21 percent of Ukrainians associating fatherland with the region of residence, 11 percent with the region of birth, 25 percent with USSR and 38 percent with Ukraine (Wolczuk 2000). A sub-regional breakdown was not available for this study, but the general conclusion is that regional and local identities were strong in Ukraine, especially Eastern and Southern parts.

The strength of regional identities in Eastern and Southern regions persisted as Ukraine moved through independence. Analyzing a mass survey conducted in 2001, Shulman (2006) notes that a relatively high number of respondents across Ukraine thought of themselves in terms of national identity. Yet when national identity was pitted against its two competitors, regional and local identities, only a minority of respondents (45 percent) chose national identity as a way of identifying themselves. Among all groups surveyed, Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians showed the highest level of national pride and had the strongest national identification. National identification

for Russian-speaking Ukrainians was almost as strong, but they felt less proud of being Ukrainian. Russian-speaking Russians, not surprisingly, displayed lowest levels of pride and degree of identification with Ukraine. This study suggests that 10 years into independence, regional and local identities remained profound and central to the ways people identified themselves. While Shulman (1998) indicates that sub-national and national identities should be understood not as competing, but complementing each other, the strength of regional identities in Eastern and Southern Ukraine most likely acted as a constraint on national unity and cohesion.

The interviews with volunteers confirmed the strength of local identification prior to the outbreak of war. Some volunteers mentioned that they “didn’t even consider Odesa to be part of Ukraine” or that they “didn’t think in those terms before”. Recent experiences of war, violence and dislocation changed that, erasing localized identities and strengthening national identification with Ukraine. The story of Tamara, an IDP from Luhans’k, illustrates the transformations among those displaced from their homes. I met Tamara at a volunteer center in Odesa among the volunteers knitting camouflage nets for Ukrainian troops. Originally from Luhans’k, Donbas region, she relocated to Odesa in early June 2014, joining her daughter, also an IDP from Crimea. Throughout my conversation with her, Tamara told me stories of violence, aggression and brutality faced by pro-Ukrainian supporters in Luhans’k. The detention of the female school principal in the school where Tamara used to work by men in balaclavas was the first of many events that she recounted as shocking and “breaking her conventional ways of thinking”. She realized confrontation was no longer peaceful; aggression and violence were becoming the new normal way to deal with opposing views. The second shock came from Crimea where her daughter lived. As the occupation of the peninsula was gaining sway, Tamara faced her fears over the well-being of her daughter: “I was shivering from stress and anxieties up to the moment when my daughter

left Crimea. As they were remaking Crimea into Russia, removing Ukrainian flags, I knew that anything could happen and things could explode in the worst way possible”. After Tamara fled to Odesa, she stayed in touch with some of her friends from Luhans’k. Through them, she got news about the distressing developments in the city: “Corpses were stored in the municipal administration”, she said; “People disappeared with no trace and their property was confiscated...[and] so many pro-Ukraine supporters were tortured to death that there could be no illusions left about the so-called liberation struggle”.

Tamara employed the language of trauma to talk about her recent experiences and explain how she came to see herself as a Ukrainian rather than a Luhanchanka (a resident of Luhans’k). When I asked her when this happened, she said that she established a sense of belonging to Ukraine after she moved to Odesa. She kept following the events on Donbas and was appalled by the rebels’ claims that “Ukraine will no longer exist on this land” (*что тут больше никогда не будет Украины*). Recalling her phone conversation with a friend from Luhans’k, Tamara said:

My friend asked me “How is your heroic Odesa? Why are you staying there? What kind of a Luhans’k-resident are you?” (*Какая же ты луганчанка?!*) And I told her – I am not a Luhank resident, I am Ukrainian. I saw all of this, I remember it all. I know what happened on Donbas! How people were killed, put in jail, thrown into underground prisons, tortured and shot. People were scared to protest. There were lots of people who supported Ukraine, but they were too scared to protest. In our block of apartments, only 6 out of 15 apartments have tenants! Only 6! At least 50 percent of people left out of fear or disappeared! (Fieldwork Interview, Odesa, July 14)

Tamara used to view Ukraine in terms of regions, each with a distinctive identity and “mentality”. The construction of boundaries was predominantly related to localities, cities and regions. Recent experiences of war and violence weakened Tamara’s local identity “of being Luhanchanka” and strengthened her national identity “of being Ukrainian”, enlarging the space of belonging from city to country. The “we” circle within which Tamara includes itself shifted from

local to national and got situated within the current violent history of the Donbas war.

Experiencing hardships, resisting beatings, and expressing one's support for Ukraine in conditions that endangered one's life created new forms of solidarities around Ukrainian national identity. As Tamara's comments illustrate, the discursive boundaries of "us" and "them" shifted away from regional identities of Luhans'kite and the particularism of a "Donbas mentality" towards Ukrainian identity and the embracing of a pro-Ukraine interpretation of political events.

As Alexander (2004) explains, extraordinary events can disrupt a social system to such a magnitude that it becomes impossible to hold benign attitudes or maintain a cynical indifference – but this can have a liberating effect. As the old ways of thinking and doing things are called into question, new opportunities emerge. Tamara's "conventional ways of thinking" were challenged to the extent that she had to abandon her old beliefs altogether; she developed a new frame of reference, putting Ukraine and loyalty to the Ukrainian state at the center of thinking and relating to the world. For Tamara, the discursive boundaries of "us" and "them" coalesced around pro-Ukraine and pro-Russia loyalties. In the interview, Tamara made multiple references to "them", meaning those who stayed on Donbas and maintained the "Donbas mentality". Talking about a friend who wanted her to return to Luhans'k, Tamara said:

She has a typical Donbas mentality, as they say (donbasiata): we work like horses and we value stability before anything else. And even Yanukovich, as bad as he was, provided peace, employment. Yes, he stole from the people... So what? Who doesn't? And Maidan ruined everything. In trolleybuses, on the back of the seats, you could see "to hell with Maidan!" slogans. There are lots of people who think that way. They blame Maidan for all the suffering and misery. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 14 July 2015)

Like many other residents of the Donbas regions, Tamara initially didn't support the Maidan protests. In her own words, she shared the "Donbas disposition", which portrayed the Maidan protests as organized exclusively by residents of Western Ukraine to advocate for an open

border with the European Union to ease labour migration control and improve employment opportunities. In that narrative, Donbas residents, with their strong work ethic, are opposed to Western Ukrainians, who are unemployed and demanding concessions from the state.

The experiences of war and socializing with other volunteers made Tamara change her views. She aligned her position with other volunteers, coming to see the protests as a fight against corruption, impunity and injustice. In this context, socializing with other volunteers had a homogenizing effect; Tamara and volunteers like her altered their political orientations and views simply because of their newly acquired understanding of war as this was diffused through the volunteer experience. Communication has played a key role not only in revising political attitudes, but also in homogenizing cultural and historical narratives. In the next section, I look at the effects of war-spurred mobility and communication in creating a sense of national unity and cohesion in volunteer communities and giving substance to newly forged identification with Ukraine.

Inter-regional cohesion: “Communicating with Ukraine”

Communication is key to forging national unity and cohesion. It enables people to develop a common understanding of the world and to envision and articulate their sameness, ultimately activating and feeding national imaginings. The war on Donbas generated high inter-regional mobility and cooperation among volunteers across Ukraine, fostering a “we” feeling that superseded regionalism. As they addressed the needs of war-affected populations, volunteers established meaningful ties with residents of other regions. This inter-regional bonding reduced cultural differences, erased region-specific stereotypes and increased appreciation of Western Ukrainians as guardians of Ukraine’s tradition and culture.

Before the outbreak of war, Ukraine was characterized as a country with low inter-regional mobility. A study conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in 2012

indicated that 35 percent of Ukrainians had never left their region of residence and 35.8 percent of Ukrainians travelled to other regions less than once a year (Kiev International 2012). Only 2.7 percent visited other regions of Ukraine once a month, and only 2.4 percent travelled across Ukraine with frequency exceeding that. The rates of inter-regional mobility differed across Ukraine, with the highest mobility noted among the residents of Kyiv and the lowest among the residents of Donbas; 60-70 percent of Donbas residents had never travelled outside their region before the war. In response to the question, “Have you travelled outside of your place of residence within Ukraine over the last 20 years,” 18 percent of respondents from Kharkiv oblast (province) said they never left their city or district (*rayon*), 6.5 percent said they travelled to places neighbouring with their province, and 19.3 percent said they visited different regions of Ukraine; 56 percent reported visiting various regions in Ukraine (ICPS Report 2015a). Answering the same question, residents of Dnipropetrovs’k said the following: 24.8 percent never left their city or rayon, and 9.8 percent never left their oblast; 19.5 percent said they travelled to neighbouring cities, and 46 percent stated that they travelled to different regions of Ukraine (ICPS Report 2015b). The rates of mobility among Odesa residents were similar, with over 50 percent of the respondents claiming to have never left their oblast or cities adjacent to it (ICPS Report 2015c).

The pattern of low inter-regional mobility was confirmed through interviews I conducted. Some of my respondents said they had never been to Western Ukraine before the war, preferring out of country travels for vacation. A few indicated that their knowledge of Western Ukraine was limited to stories told by friends or to a one-time visit years ago. There was a sentiment among some volunteers that inter-regional mobility and communication in Ukraine was intentionally strained by politicians seeking to divide the population for electoral and political gains. Some remarked that the physical infrastructure for inter-regional mobility, including trains

and other types of transportation, was lacking “with no trains to travel from Kharkiv to L’viv”. Not surprisingly, low inter-regional mobility reinforced regional identities, alienating residents of different regions from each other.

The Maidan protests provided space for inter-regional socializing and strengthening inter-regional ties. Most of the protesters were from Western and Central Ukraine, with only a small percentage of participants from Eastern and Southern regions. Those who did travel to Kyiv to join the protests had an opportunity to meet and establish connections with people from other regions. Recalling her life at Maidan, Alena, a volunteer from Kharkiv said: “I met tons of people from Western and Central Ukraine, from Odesa too. We stayed at my friend’s place. She sheltered another six people at her rented apartment. We slept like sardines in a tin – people from Dnipropetrovs’k, Odesa, Kharkiv, Kyiv and L’viv. We didn’t know each other before, but we stayed in touch after the Maidan protests.” Other volunteers who supported the Maidan protest agreed that the protests in Kyiv played an important role in inter-regional socializing; protesters met and engaged in a discussion of the protests and other aspects of political and social life in Ukraine. “Now everyone is connected in one way or another, everyone knows people from Kyiv, Odesa, L’viv. Everything got mixed up in the country, consolidating it and uniting people”, remarked a volunteer from Kharkiv.

The subsequent outbreak of violence on Donbas resulted in a remarkable increase in inter-regional cooperation aimed at meeting wartime needs. Frequent travels to the front provided numerous opportunities for volunteers to meet and exchange contacts with each other and with soldiers from across Ukraine. Meeting new people at checkpoints, stopping by various military units to deliver supplies, and receiving requests for support are some of the ways volunteers expanded their circles. Talking about military units under care, a volunteer from Odesa remarked

that even though she found it was more effective to help specific units, war realities made it difficult to limit assistance:

Every time we go to the front, we meet new boys (soldiers) asking for help. For example, we are at the gas station refueling our car – a vehicle with soldiers arrives. We start chatting: where are you from? Kryvyi Rih? And we are volunteers from Odesa. As soon as they find out that we are volunteers – they ask for help. If we have anything to give them right away – we share. If not, we exchange contacts and try to visit them during our next trip to the front. Then, they give our contacts to other soldiers – and we get new requests. Just like that, very sporadically. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 14 July 2015)

These spontaneous encounters often became the basis for long-term cooperation and assistance. A number of volunteers said the sporadic ties formed at the frontlines were characterized by a high level of trust and respect, creating a favourable environment for social bonding. Some said they now treated volunteer and military engagement as a yardstick against which a person's trustworthiness was measured.

Trust is considered functionally necessary for the emergence of harmonious social relationships that underpin national unity and cohesion. As Lewis and Weigert (1985) suggest, trust is contingent on various factors. Space-time specifics can be key in establishing trustworthy relationships, because the setting of interactions accompanied by certain cues can act as a basis upon which the person's identity and trustworthiness is interpreted. Gross and Stone (1964) call identity certifying cues "identity documents", referring to another person's expected behavior and trustworthiness based on his/her external characteristics. In the context of war in Ukraine, I found volunteering to be a trust-implying activity that helped people rapidly establish meaningful ties, and the trust was inter-regional.

Inter-regional cohesion and unity was reinforced by communication with soldiers and volunteer battalion fighters from across Ukraine. At the start of the violence on Donbas, defense battalions, special police battalions and reserve battalions of the National Guard were established,

following the territorial principle of organization (Puglisi 2015). When talking about the military units they assisted, many volunteers said they initially started helping out the units territorially formed in their region. Through multiple rotations, partial relocations of personnel and staff restructuring, the territorially constrained composition of defense and military units diversified to include men from various regions of Ukraine. Olena, a female volunteer from Kharkiv, explained that the first group of volunteer battalion fighters they set out to help was predominantly from Donbas. Over time, the composition of the Donbas battalion changed with more combatants from Western Ukraine joining its ranks. The volunteers who were fundraising and procuring for the battalion changed the name of their network from “Donbas” to “East and West Together” to reflect the regional diversity and emphasize that people from Eastern and Western Ukraine had joined forces to fight for the unity of Ukraine.

The territorial location of Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovs’k turned these two cities into hubs of medical assistance. Volunteers helping at the hospitals were “proud that a great number of soldiers have passed through their hospital, from all over Ukraine.” Others said they devoted more attention to the combatants coming outside the region, as they didn’t have family nearby to care for them. Undertaking the bulk of work related to the treatment of combatants meant that volunteers from frontline regions had to make large-scale efforts to fundraise for expensive medical supplies and equipment. Reaching out to volunteers from other regions through Facebook was one way to extend the fundraising capacity. As one volunteer from Odesa recalled: “I accidently found out that a friend of mine got injured and was undergoing a long treatment in Kharkiv. He told me that the medical supplies he needs are very expensive, with prices ranging from 700 UAH to 1,500 UAH per medicine and he can no longer afford covering the costs”. To help her friend, Tatyana called on volunteers from other regions, especially L’viv and Ternopil’,

for help and posted a call for help on Facebook. People across Ukraine responded, donating money or medicine. She said the willingness of people from other regions to help out made her realize that the strength of Ukrainians is their unity. She went on to talk about the importance of all regions of Ukraine coming together:

Donbas produced coal, but it didn't feed them. They had to eat something else! Southern Ukraine could survive without coal, using wood logs instead, but we always had fish, fields to produce bread, a sea port. That was our contribution. It's wrong to argue what region contributed more. Anyways, I don't want to have separate regions, arguing over their importance. We are all equal. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 25 July 2015)

As this comment suggests, a newly acquired appreciation of different regions of Ukraine and a sense of the value of cooperation decreased the saliency of regional identities and reduced regional competition. Here and elsewhere, the discourses on regional equality were accompanied by a shift towards cooperative modes of interaction.

Other volunteers noted that recent upheavals made them realize the harmful effects of regional divisions. Some emphasized that the responsibility for internal conflict lay squarely on the shoulders of Ukrainian citizens. A volunteer from Dnipropetrovs'k remarked, "Our fault, the fault of Ukrainian citizens, lies in our constant self-questioning and internal discord. We were looking for problems internally, dividing ourselves between "west" and "east" or "Russian-speaking" and "Ukrainian-speaking" populations" (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs'k, 11 August 2015). Recent events made him realise that internal differences mattered little in the face of external invasion. Instead of wasting energies on internal bickering, my respondent concluded, Ukrainians should unite around common goals of addressing issues related to national security, corruption and reforms. Many other volunteers engaged in discussions of regional divisions, rethinking the saliency of previous cleavages through the lens of new political developments.

Inter-regional cooperation was essential for volunteers helping IDPs. They found that

resettlement and the social and professional integration of IDPs required greater coordination of and reliance on inter-regional networks. The territorial location of Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovs'k turned the cities into major destinations for civilians fleeing violence on Donbas. As volunteers from "Station Kharkiv" explained, the flood of displaced people was difficult to manage in the summer of 2014; in August, every day 600 to 800 individuals arrived at Kharkiv train station looking for safe refuge. As volunteers struggled to find affordable housing for resettlement, they increasingly relied on their contacts from other regions. A considerable amount of resettlement work was organized at the grassroots level, with the Ukrainian Emergency Ministry initially coordinating the effort. The representatives of the Ministry had joint shifts with volunteers from Station Kharkiv at the train station, using the Ministry's database to resettle IDPs across Ukraine. This did not suffice for long, as "the Ministry depleted its contacts as regional administrations started to increasingly turn down IDPs, claiming that there is no state-owned housing left in the regions", noted one of my respondents. "Of course, IDPs is a problem for regional administrations because their resettlement requires lots of resources and money", she added. (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 11 June 2015)

As state-led resettlement efforts reduced in scope and efficiency, Station Kharkiv volunteers established contacts with partner networks in other regions. Volunteers from Odesa, Southern Ukraine, became increasingly known for taking care of disabled civilians and orphans evacuated from Luhans'k and Donets'k oblasts. Volunteers from Ivano-Frankivs'k, Western Ukraine, became a point of contact for those willing to relocate to Western Ukraine. Most of the initial resettlement efforts were sporadic and relied on personal contacts of volunteers with "someone from L'viv sending a private message on Facebook and saying that they can accept 30 people at the moment" or "members of the Baptist church in Luts'k (Northwest Ukraine) getting

in touch with us saying that they want to host IDPs in their newly built orphanage for local orphans”, commented a volunteer from Station Kharkiv.

In conversations with volunteers, I heard multiple stories of inter-regional cooperation to resolve complex problems. Some of these went beyond emergency assistance and resulted in a long-lasting change in the lives of those affected by war. Among these cases was the story of a single mother of five and an elderly disabled woman fleeing violence from Popasna, Luhans’k region. Alla, a volunteer from Station Kharkiv in charge of housing for IDPs, remembered this story particularly well, as the resettlement not only addressed the urgent problem of the family’s safety, but resulted in changed attitudes towards Ukraine, its Western regions in particular. Initially unwilling to relocate to Western Ukraine, the family was afraid of “hardcore nationalists and thugs” living there, an image of people from Western Ukraine often propagated by Russian media. Recalling this incident, Alla said laughingly, “They were so scared of everyone that they didn’t even want to ride in the same car with us, volunteers. They thought that we were part of the human traffic network and would sell them for body parts”. Unable to flee to Russia because of bureaucratic hurdles and left with no other choice, the family agreed to resettle in Luts’k, Northwest Ukraine. In the span of a month, the resettled family established close ties and grew attached to the city. Alla got a grateful phone call and an update – the family had decided to permanently relocate to Luts’k. Alla jokingly concluded, “Everyone who has negative stereotypes about pro-Ukrainian supporters and residents of Western regions should be sent for therapy there to see the warmth and hospitality of people and understand the absurdity of stereotypes and propaganda”.

In other words, volunteers went beyond simply providing assistance; in some cases, they managed to erase inter-regional cleavages and stereotypes. In fact, volunteers from Station

Kharkiv said an implicit part of their mission was to nourish attachment to Ukraine among those they supported, using care and assistance as a means. Officially, the volunteers adopted the philosophy of the Red Cross, claiming neutrality and staying away from political affiliations or political discussions with the internally displaced. Yet their office was decorated with Ukrainian symbols, and all volunteers wore Ukrainian attire. A general consensus among the volunteers was that actions speak louder than words. They made an effort to explain that the assistance was not government sponsored but rested on the good will of Ukrainian people. The increased regional mobility and cooperation between volunteers across Ukraine helped them feel united and partly erased feelings of regional difference.

Inter-regional learning

Along with inter-regional cooperation, volunteers often engaged in inter-regional learning initiatives. During my fieldwork, I attended a three-day forum “HromadaFest” (CommunityFest) organized by volunteers from Dnipropetrovs’k under the tutelage of the regional administration. The forum brought together over 200 volunteers from across Ukraine to discuss their work, share experiences and brainstorm on how to more effectively organize assistance. The forum featured hands-on workshops on volunteering, including war veteran rehabilitation and the provision of legal assistance.

The emergence of spaces where volunteers could get together, share their best practices and establish contacts with partner networks extended the effectiveness of volunteer efforts, while also contributing to the formation of nation-wide social and professional ties. Recalling the first training session she organized for volunteers from Vinnytsia, West Central Ukraine, Odesa-based volunteer Olena stated:

In early summer of 2014, we literally began “communicating with Ukraine”. I was asked to organize a workshop for volunteers from Vinnytsia on camouflage

knitting and other things we were doing in Odesa at that time. I was then invited to attend a training session in Vinnytsia, organized by the local activists. They told me that there would be learning sessions, plus some time to socialize with “the rest of Ukraine”. I found it very interesting and exciting. At that time, I met tons of new people and was surprised to see how similar our concerns, work and desire to help were. Everyone wanted to get acquainted, share their knowledge and best practices. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 20 July 2015)

Addressing wartime needs subsumed subnational differences as volunteers saw themselves working towards the same end. These experiences and interactions allowed them to see “sameness” and articulate the idea of a common future, an essential part of national imaginings.

As the urgency of volunteer work subsided and the issue of emotional exhaustion rose, volunteers increasingly engaged in leisure activities to recuperate and socialize. Among these initiatives was a three-day fieldtrip organized in Nikopol’ during my fieldwork, with 70 volunteers and war veterans from 18 cities getting together to rest, share best practices and strengthen personal ties. The location of the trip carries symbolic meaning for early Ukrainian statehood. Nikopol’, previously known as “Mykytyn Rih”, is a city with a rich history. It was populated by the Cossacks in the 15th century and comprised an administrative division of the Zaporizhian Sich, a semi-autonomous polity of the 16-18th centuries in Ukraine before the territory was annexed by the Russian Empire. The field trip organized by volunteers for volunteers included a tour to the grave of the commander of the Zaporizhian Cossacks, Ivan Sirko. The participants also visited other historic sites, including Tomakovs’ka Sich (another settlement of the Cossacks) and the museum of local history (see Photo 6.3). The trip featured volunteer workshops, socializing sessions and a concert titled “Only Together”, underlying the importance of unity and cooperation. Some of my respondents said this was the first opportunity for them to learn more about the history and culture of Ukraine. Trips and tours like this one suggest inter-regional communication became an important aspect of wartime volunteering, with the new modes of socializing revolving around learning Ukrainian culture and history.

During my fieldwork, I observed an increased interest to Ukrainian history in volunteer communities. One of the priorities of Kharkiv AutoMaidan, a network that emerged on Maidan and continued its functioning amidst war, for example, is to organize cultural events where people can learn the history of Ukraine. During my stay in Kharkiv, volunteers organized a documentary screening about the creation of Ukrainian People's Republic of 1917-1920 (*Ukrainska Narodna Respublika*). The screening was followed by a discussion mediated by a local historian. As some of the attendees noted, there was a growing demand among volunteers to learn about Ukraine and its heritage, which was not the case in pre-Maidan Kharkiv. There were many other cultural initiatives taking off the ground, despite the war, including city tours organized by volunteers for National Guard fighters during their days off with emphasis on the Ukrainian identity of Kharkiv. History and cultural learning was an important part of volunteer work and war socializing.

A few of my respondents reported that thanks to the personal contacts with people from Western Ukraine, they learnt more about the history of Ukraine, particularly on the subjects that were seen as controversial and divisive prior to the war. The account of Iryna, a volunteer from Dnipropetrovs'k is telling. As I talked to her about volunteering, I noticed a book on her desk "The Liberation Struggle of Ukraine" on the history of the Ukrainian nationalist movement. The book was gifted to her by volunteers from L'viv, Western Ukraine, after she mentioned her interest in the Bandera question. In light of recent experiences, Iryna realized that she was "under the influence of propaganda" and didn't know much about the history of her country.

Back in the days, when I used to tour around Ukraine with my arts exhibits, I noted a discrepancy in the ways we were taught about Western Ukraine and what I encountered in real life. It really confused me... We were told that Western Ukrainians are all radicals, "Banderites" (banderovtsy). I found Western Ukrainians interesting to talk to. When I was in L'viv for the first time, I was surprised to see that people switch to Russian when you address them in Russian. I had to tell them not to! There was disconnect between what we were brainwashed into and real life. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs'k, 12 August 2015)

Reading the book about Bandera, Iryna says, also made her think about the Holodomor. Iryna recalls that the Holodomor was a matter of passionate debates before the war, yet she didn't take interest in the subject back then.

We didn't try to understand what it was about (my ne vnikali). Now you look at it differently. Now I recollect my grandma telling me about the Holodomor, even though she used to live in the city and didn't suffer the starvation, she had friends and acquaintances who did. And she told me about that, but I didn't believe her. How is it possible to execute someone for picking up a frozen potato? How is it possible? I thought that my grandmother exaggerated everything to make the story more powerful, more horrific. She always told these stories whispering... the fear for repressions remained with her for the rest of her life. Now I excavate these stories and memories and reflect on them. I realized that the older generation truly lived through these experiences, but we found it too hard to believe. It was impossible to believe that! Just as it was impossible to believe that Russia would attack us, up till very recent events. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs'k, 12 August 2015)

The excavation of memory and increased interest to history and past experiences is part of what the national myth making is. As Anderson (2006) notes, all nation-states, even those newly emerged, invest energies into developing "the myth of antiquity". Relating to the past events in new ways and articulating links between the past, the present and the future is important as it creates continuity around national imaginings, increases the legitimacy of a nation and strengthens an emotional bond between individuals and the conception of the nation. Volunteers dig out and reinterpret past grievances with the Russian empire and the Soviet Union in a way that reinforces the boundary making between Ukraine and Russia and integrates the current war on Donbas in the historic narrative of national struggle against the "old" enemy.

Similarly, my respondents interpreted their war experiences in ways that ascribe meaning to "nation" and solidify their attachment to it. There was a sense of "irreparable debt" to those who died on Maidan or in the Donbas war fighting for "Ukrainian nation", freedom and dignity. As one of my respondents noted:

Maidan had a profound effect on me and my understanding of the situation. Those children from Western Ukraine that protected themselves with wooden shields against bullets. I watched a video-address of a boy with his father from Maidan. I don't remember their names, but that's not important. What is important is the essence of their message. The purpose of it all. When I was listening to it, I thought to myself "God, we missed out on so many things. And this child of 16 years old understands what his land is, what Ukraine is! We are much older, but we have lots to learn from him, even though he is dead now. I feel embarrassed that they died so that I, in some ways, stayed alive. Thanks to them, for all I know, Ukraine will prevail! (Fieldwork, Odesa, 2015 July 2015)

Here, we can observe the erasure of individual names and stories and their replacement with discourses about national struggle to survive and rejuvenate in the future. The fact that "names" are not important and what matters is one's allegiance to the nation resonates with Anderson's (2006) discussion about the importance of "unknown soldiers" and their sacrifice for the national imaginings. Through nation-centered narratives, individuals inject meaning in otherwise random death that becomes commonplace in wartime. Rituals and commemorative practices play an important role in strengthening national sentiments as they provide a symbolic infrastructure for people to relate to each other and create meaning from the raw war materials.

Not only did volunteers find new ways to relate to the past, but they became creators of memories and history. Alexander (2004) calls collective agents that engage into the construction and representation of the trauma process "carrier groups". Their main goal is to project a trauma claim to a wider audience, making use of particular historic situations, symbolic resources at hand and available institutional structures (12). Acting as "carrier groups", volunteers created multiple exhibits in the locales of my fieldwork to share war stories with the rest of Ukraine. These exhibits had an informative function to present evidence of war crimes; they also sought to extend the circle of empathizers and those who identify with the struggle of Ukrainian people. In Dnipropetrovs'k, volunteers opened the first museum of ATO (anti-terrorist operation). The museum contains a number of expositions titled "Civic Heroic Acts of Dnipropetrovs'k Residents", acknowledging

the contributions of civilians in the defense of the city; and “The Hall of Memory” honoring those who died on Donbas. The commemorative displays and artifacts serve to solidify the boundaries of national imaginings elicited by war. In this way, volunteers become active carriers of national memory, performing constitutive functions of national narrative and memory articulation.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that war and volunteering have had a profound effect on the rethinking of national identification in volunteer communities. One change pertains to the boundaries of belonging. Russia has emerged as ‘the aggressor state’ in the fighting of which volunteers consolidate. As a result, many volunteers disassociated themselves from the Russian state and culture. Many volunteers also reported breaking social, familial and professional ties with those who are loyal to it. These changes went hand in hand with another shift where local and pan-ethnic identities became subsumed by national identification. Instead of localism and pan-ethnic identification, the boundary got reified around a Ukrainian nation as a main point of reference.

My findings suggest that volunteers have also strengthened their identification with Ukrainian culture and history. My respondents reported that thanks to the personal contacts with volunteers from Western Ukraine, they learnt more about the history of Ukraine, particularly on the subjects that were seen as controversial and divisive prior to the war. As a result of new interactions and experiences, volunteers altered their interpretation of the past events, while also actively engaging in memory making in reference to the war on Donbas.

The intensification of inter-regional communication and mobility plays an important role in fostering unity and national cohesion. Through various types of exchanges and cooperation, volunteers formed new types of solidarities. This, in turn, inspired the imagining of “sameness” in ways not hitherto available. Echoing Anderson’s theory of linguistic fields of communication and

exchange, Ukrainian wartime needs created a space for particular types of communication and exchange to take place, bringing people together and strengthening their sense of belonging to the same nation and working towards the same goals. The wartime bonding allowed a rapidly growing number of people to think about themselves and to relate to others in ways that put the idea of Ukraine at the center of new social relationships. This dynamic inter-regional cooperation and mobility instigated by war provided space for volunteers to connect with those living in other regions and form trustworthy bonds, partly erasing regional boundaries and divisions.

Chapter 7. The reordering of language ideologies and language identities amidst war

In Ukraine, language is an important facet of national identity. The use of language as a pretext for Russia's aggression towards Ukraine and increased identification with Ukraine amidst war disturbed the well-established language hierarchies in volunteer communities. Many individuals altered their attitudes towards the Ukrainian and Russian languages and, to a lesser degree, changed their linguistic practices. This chapter examines the shifts in language sensibilities and sensitivities in volunteer communities, linking them to the discourses about national belonging and state loyalty. More broadly, it addresses the reordering of language identities in linguistically diverse societies amidst war and war engagement.

For that purpose, the chapter provides historical background of language politics in Ukraine, pointing to language ideologies existent prior to war. It then turns to an analysis of changes that occurred because of war, presenting three main findings. First, it detects the emergence of narratives that decouple language, patriotism and national belonging. It shows that war engagement made it possible to construct patriotism and loyalty to the country in relation to actions supporting it, reducing the importance of language as a marker of national identity. One effect is the authentication of Russian speakers as legitimate members of the Ukrainian nation. At the same time, however, war provided an opportunity for some to position Russian as a "language of the enemy" and frame the use of Russian as a security threat to Ukraine's statehood, thereby securitizing language use. Contesting discourses on language use indicate that no social consensus about language has been achieved yet. With disagreements persisting, the chapter demonstrates that some tangible change has taken place. This pertains to increased cultural, symbolic and emotive identification with the Ukrainian language among Russophone volunteers. I contend war

mobility and socializing played a key role in enabling attitudinal and sociolinguistic change as it presented volunteers with a new linguistic landscape essential for the reordering of language identities. The chapter concludes by demonstrating that increased social openness to Ukraine did not automatically translate into changes in sociolinguistic practices, but some volunteers switched to Ukrainian or became more accommodating to Ukrainophones in bilingual interactions.

Historical background of language politics in Ukraine

The historical context of language politics in Ukraine can be traced back to late imperial Russia. The imperial state administration envisioned its western region (including Ukraine) and its people as “primordially Russian,” not belonging to separate nationalities, but part of an “all-Russian” national identity (Dolbilov 2004). In line with this thinking, the Ukrainian language, known as “Little Russian,” was not recognized as a separate language with the imperial government claiming that Ukrainian was “nothing, but Russian corrupted by the Polish influence” (Miller 2000 quoted in Remy 2007: 7). Fears of the Ukrainian anti-Russian movement played a key role in the treatment of Ukrainian. It was heavily censored and banned for education and publishing in the late 18th century. Language restrictions went hand in hand with attempts to spread the use of Russian among Ukrainians. As Laitin (1998) states, these attempts had some success. By the 1917 revolution, most of the titular elites in the Russian empire were bilingual and had integrated Russian into their linguistic repertoires.

The regulation of languages in the Soviet era was part of the consolidation of Soviet power (Martin 2001; Bilaniuk 2005). Soviet policies on language can be divided into two distinct periods. During the 1920s and early 1930s, the policy of *korenizatsiia* (indigenisation) encouraged the usage of “national languages” with the aim of creating an anti-imperialist multinational state. The main goals of the Soviet-initiated *korenizatsiia* policies were to counteract the legacy of

Russian imperialism and, more importantly, to elicit the support of titular nationals in establishing Soviet rule. The main assumption was that minority groups would be more accepting of the new Soviet regime if they functioned in their own language (Pavlenko 2008). As Martin (2001) explains, *korenizatsiia* had three components: the formation of national governing elites, the promotion of the national culture and the use of the national language. In Ukraine, educated titular nationals were allowed to form the core party leadership and occupy positions in the culture sphere. Ukrainian language became the language of instruction at schools for children, whose “native language” was Ukrainian. This included Russified Ukrainians who were required to send their children to Ukrainian language schools. Forced subscriptions to Ukrainian newspapers, mandatory Ukrainian language signs, and the development of theaters and cultural institutions in the native language were among the policies designated to promote the use of Ukrainian (Crisp 1990; Martin 2001). Two notable exceptions were that, first, the state did not push for the predominant use of Ukrainian in state/party organs, and second, the children of workers did not have to study in Ukrainian (Martin 2001). During this phase, the absolute equality of all languages in a multinational state was stressed and the privileged role of Russian rejected (Crisp 1990).

The policy of indigenisation with its promotion of national languages was envisioned as a temporary measure. It was expected that, over time, a socialist society would overcome ethnic divisions and titular languages would be phased out, forging the way for a single world language as a superstructure (Martin 2001). In Ukraine, the language indigenisation policy resulted in a dramatic increase in the use of Ukrainian in public domains and urban centers, spaces where Russian had hitherto dominated (*ibid.*). At the same time, Martin claims, the language planning policies of this period cannot be seen as successful because they produced a merely bilingual Russian/Ukrainian culture (Martin 2001: 122-3 quoted in Yekelchuk 2004). Moreover, the policies

had the opposite effect to what the Soviet elites had envisioned; instead of mitigating interethnic conflict, they firmly entrenched ethnic identification and reified its boundaries (Pavlenko 2008).

In the early 1930s, the policy of indigenisation was revised and reversed. Martin (2001) indicates three reasons that led to this outcome. First, the Soviet elites came to see these policies as a threat to the unity and cohesion of the Soviet state. Second, *korenizatsiia* caused resentment among the Russians residing in Ukraine, raising questions about their status and culture. Third, and most importantly, Soviet elites believed the *korenizatsiia* policies exacerbated resistance to collectivization in non-Russian regions, since resistance was especially fierce in the non-Russian periphery. A December 1932 Politburo Decree unofficially signified the end of Ukrainization and the beginning of a wave of terror in Ukraine against “bourgeois nationalists” that were seen as the main obstacle to Soviet rule (Martin 2001).

During this time, the advancement of Russian superseded indigenisation, with Russian seen an instrument that could eradicate the threat of ethnic empowerment and serve as a means of inter-ethnic communication. By and large, Russian was seen as a vehicle of state consolidation and a cure against nationalist sentiments. As Pavlenko (2008) notes, russification in the 1930s comprised two pillars: status and acquisition planning for Russian language and corpus planning for titular languages. Acquisition planning was aimed at increasing the number of Russian speakers. To that end, Russian was promoted in various ways, including its forceful institutional advancement and the Russification of the educational system. The latter was achieved through increased hours dedicated to Russian and a centralized curriculum at schools. After 1938, the study of Russian became obligatory, starting in the second grade (Bilaniuk and Melnyk 2008). Titular languages continued to be used in some domains, particularly in the arts, the press and education, until 1938 (Pavlenko 2008), but their status became less prestigious in urban areas and their

knowledge less useful (Kulyk 2011b). By and large, Ukrainian became limited to domains of culture and folklore, while the state functioned mostly in Russian (Arel 2017). In terms of corpus planning, the Soviets employed linguistic interference, in which the orthography, morphology and grammar of titular languages, including Ukrainian, were altered to make them resemble Russian (Bilaniuk 2005). The terminological work was conducted in a way to promote Russian, which became the main source of neologisms related to socialism and Soviet philosophy (Riabchenko 2018).

In the 1950s, changes in educational policy further disadvantaged Ukrainian. A new law stipulated that the language of instruction at schools should be based on parental choice, not the nationality of children (Bilinsky 1964). With Russian seen as a language of social and professional mobility and enjoying higher status, most parents in urban areas outside of Western Ukraine opted for their children to be schooled in Russian (Kulyk 2011b). By 1987 in Kyiv, less than a quarter (70,000 out of 300,000) of all schoolchildren were taught in Ukrainian (Masenko 2004 quoted in Bilaniuk and Melnyk 2008: 349). Arel (2017) notes that in the 1980s, the number of students attending Ukrainian-language schools in Ukraine plummeted to its lowest since the creation of the Soviet Union – close to 50 percent. Most were in small towns and villages, while Russian was prevalent in big cities, except for Western Ukraine.

Kulyk (2011b) notes that the shift to Russian created a discrepancy between communicative practices and identification with particular languages in most Soviet republics. In Ukraine, for example, many Russian speakers retained their ethno-linguistic identity, identifying as Ukrainians and seeing Ukrainian as their “native language.” This was the case even though they no longer used it for everyday communication or defined it as the language of their upbringing. In large part, this was because public discourses supporting the existence of separate nations

remained intact. In these discourses, language was perceived as a major attribute of “the nation” and a crucial means of self-determination. This attachment to the Ukrainian language also carried emotional weight, with some Russian speakers seeing it as “the language closer to their soul” (Kulyk, 2011b: 635). Therefore, Soviet rule generated a wide gap between the language use and ethnocultural identity in Ukraine, with individuals identifying as Ukrainians in terms of ethnicity and language, but speaking Russian as the language of communication (Kulyk 2013).

The glasnost’ period and the following dissolution of the Soviet Union brought the language question to the fore of Ukraine’s political life. In 1989, Ukraine stepped onto the path of de-Sovietization, passing a language law that declared Ukrainian the sole state language. The law aimed to address its precarious situation during the Soviet era by promoting its use in Ukraine’s public sphere. The primary goal was to enhance the status of the Ukrainian language and make it more prestigious in Ukraine. On a symbolic level, the decision signaled that Ukrainian would be required for public administration positions (Arel 2017), which asserted the importance of Ukrainian at the state level. Practically, it made Ukrainian the language of written documentation within and between regional and state authorities (except in Crimea) and proclaimed Ukrainian as the language of primary and secondary education in Ukraine. The latter was generally accepted by Russian speakers because it drew on the “native language” principle in schooling and education institutionalized by the Soviet Union, whereby Russian speakers saw Ukrainian as their native language even though they no longer used it for communication (Hrycak 2006).

Russian, in turn, was demoted to the status of a national minority language and guaranteed protection along with other national minority languages of Ukraine. This was seen as controversial by the opponents of the law; they claimed Russian should be given a special status based on its function as a language of inter-ethnic communication in Ukraine, the status given to

Russian during Soviet times (Arel 2017). The high number of Russian speakers in Ukraine was also seen as an argument against equating Russian with a national minority language. Despite some tensions, Cserniczkó and Ferenc (2016) contend that the 1989 language policies can be interpreted as a compromise, elevating the status of Ukrainian while preserving the predominant position of Russian in the public life of predominantly Russian-speaking cities.

Language politics became increasingly contentious after Ukraine's independence. As Ukraine claimed its right to a separate existence in 1991, its titular language came to be envisioned as an important legitimizer of independence. Some nationalists saw the promotion of the Ukrainian language as a main nation-building goal; among other things, it would revitalize the Ukrainian nation and address historical injustices of suppression and subjugation. They questioned the loyalty and patriotism of Russian speaking Ukrainians, seeing them as "infected" with Russian mentality and "traitors" of Ukraine (Shulman 1998: 619). There was little recognition of the fact that most Russian speaking Ukrainians also identified with Ukraine. Not surprisingly, Russian speaking Ukrainians resisted this categorization, often emphasizing their "biculturalism" – compatible identifications with both Ukrainian and Russian culture. This position was criticized, in turn, by Ukrainian nationalists who saw "biculturalism" and "bilingualism" as a way to legitimize the dominance of the Russian language and culture on Ukrainian lands (Bilaniuk 2005).

In the following years, the language question remained high on the political agenda, with no political consensus in sight. The 1994 - 1996 period saw no drastic changes in language policies. The status of Ukrainian as the sole state language was reaffirmed by the 1996 Constitution of Ukraine, which also guaranteed "the free development, use and protection of Russian, and other languages of national minorities" (Cserniczkó and Ferenc 2016: 6). The use of Russian was not

prohibited, or even inhibited in the public domain, as Kulyk remarks; this allowed it to maintain its dominant position, especially in the southeast (Kulyk 2006).

The 2004-2006 period signified a visible shift in language policies, with some terming it a period of powerful Ukrainization (Cserniczkó and Ferenc 2016). After the Orange Revolution, stricter implementation of language regulations were pursued, with the aim of strengthening the position of the Ukrainian language in education, administration, culture, and economy (ibid). The justification given by the ruling elites touched on the question of historical justice. The positive discrimination of Ukrainian was justified by its long persecution throughout history. In the framing of the language situation in Ukraine, the existing bilingualism was seen as a sign of “malaise” and as requiring correction. As Cserniczkó and Ferenc (2016) state, the ambition of the political elites was to create a monolingual state and address the disjuncture between the de jure monolingualism in Ukraine and de facto linguistic diversity.

These policies and their stricter implementation helped the Ukrainian language make gains in terms of status and use. The latter was especially noticeable in government and education. The share of Ukrainian language schools and pre-schools increased steadily after Ukraine’s independence, reaching 82 and 86 percent of children in the academic year 2010-2011 (Kulyk 2013:284). The dominance of the Ukrainian language in higher education was even more pronounced, reaching over 90 percent of students. Regional differences, however, persisted in the advancement of Ukrainian. Western and central regions asserted the primacy of Ukrainian in education faster than southern and eastern ones. While 99 percent of pupils were instructed in Ukrainian in L’viv and Luts’k and 96 percent in Kyiv, in Odesa (south Ukraine) 65 percent were schooled in Ukrainian, on Donbas 29 percent and in Crimea only 5 percent (Kulyk 2013). In addition, the use of Ukrainian in southern and eastern regions was often limited to lessons, with

informal communication conducted in Russian (Arel 2017). Regional unevenness and linguistic hybridity were also factors of Ukraine's public administration section with a wide discrepancy between spoken and written usage of Ukrainian in eastern and southern regions with Russian remaining the spoken language in public offices (Kulyk 2013). In addition, a number of high ranking officials in the government exclusively relied on Russian, undercutting the status of Ukrainian as the sole state language.

Language legislation was for the first time formally amended in 2012, under the presidency of Victor Yanukovich. He supported a status upgrade for the Russian language during his election campaign, and his subsequent presidency featured resumed attempts to revert to the use of Russian in sectors where Ukrainian had made progress (Kulyk 2013). These attempts culminated in the adoption of legislation that "granted Russian a 'regional' status on half of Ukraine's territory and legalized its use in many domains all over the country" (Kulyk 2013: 284). It also granted parents, under certain conditions, the right to request authorities to open classes in a language of instruction different from the language of the school (Arel 2017). The adoption of the legislation became possible because of the European Charter for Regional or Minority languages ratified in Ukraine in 2006. However, scholars (Moser 2013; Arel 2017) note that the Ukrainian law inhibited the spirit of the Charter; protecting socially dominant languages, such as Russian in Ukraine, did not fit the Charter's aim. The law also disturbed the status quo between Russian and Ukrainian languages, challenging the status of Ukrainian as the sole state language in some regions of Ukraine. It was perceived by many in Ukraine as jeopardizing the use of Ukrainian, causing social and political contestation (Kulyk 2013).

Language cleavages resurfaced in Ukraine during and post Maidan. Two distinctive developments should be mentioned in this context. The first pertains to a parliamentary resolution

to repeal the 2012 law that expanded the use of Russian the day after President Yanukovich fled Ukraine. While the resolution was subsequently vetoed by interim President Oleksandr Turchynov, the parliamentary move to abolish the law was politically and symbolically untimely (Arel 2017). It added to the political instability in Ukraine and alienated eastern regions. The second development follows from the first and concerns Russia's reaction to the repeal. Russian state officials framed it in radical terms, claiming that the Maidan government was seeking to "ban" Russian and that ethnic Russians and Russian speaking civilians in Ukraine should be physically protected from political violence and tyranny unfolding in Ukraine (Kersten 2014). Russian President Vladimir Putin invoked Article 61 of the Russian Constitution, whereby "the Russian Federation shall guarantee its citizens protection and patronage abroad," and the internationally recognized "Responsibility to Protect" norm as legal and moral justifications to intervene and defend compatriots (sootchestvenniki) in Ukraine (Wanner 2014: 428; Kersten 2014).

Russia's Compatriot policy has been used as a frame to interact with ethnic Russians and Russian speakers abroad after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It was strengthened under Putin's Presidency to wield power and engage Russian speaking societies. Knott conceptualizes it as ethnocitizenship; the policy does not grant compatriots equal legal status or rights as Russian citizens, but "offers a form of quasi-citizenship for non-resident kin communities" (2017: 18). It promotes inclusion in terms of the rights, benefits and status of external non-resident ethnicized communities. In effect, it presupposes a status of membership and belonging to ethnic Russians and Russian speakers across post-Soviet spaces in Russia's sphere of influence. The application of the Compatriot policy to Ukraine equated Russian speaking populations with loyalties to Russia, imposing a fixed identity on Russian speakers. By disingenuously claiming Russian speakers were persecuted in Ukraine, Putin legitimized the annexation of Crimea and prompted action for the

“protection” of Russophone residents of Donbas. In the months following the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of war, the language issue was used as a means to legitimate protests and rebellion.

Since the outbreak of war on Donbas, there has been no political consensus on the language issue in Ukraine (Csernicskó and Máté 2017; Arel 2017). As Csernicskó and Máté remark, after the Maidan protests, Ukraine’s President and Prime Minister both made gestures towards Russian speaking citizens of Ukraine to ease tensions and reduce the threat to national unity. They pointed out that the attempt to abolish the 2012 language law was mistaken and a more tolerant language policy should be designed to unite the country. A new balanced Language Act was supposed to be developed, taking into account the regional, ethnic and national minority diversity of Ukraine, but has not yet materialized (Csernicskó and Máté 2017: 6).

More recently, however, some steps have been taken to strengthen the position of the Ukrainian language. A new education law adopted in 2017 stipulates that all secondary education will be taught in Ukrainian. The law substantively reduces instruction in national minority languages (including Russian) and limits them to special lessons only (Sasse 2017). This law followed one signed in June 2017, increasing the mandatory share of Ukrainian language content on national and regional television. While seen as controversial by some, these steps have been received favourably by many prominent linguists and nationalist intellectuals in Ukraine. As Csernicskó and Máté (2017) remark, many embraced a primordial, national romantic view that ties the Ukrainian language to the Ukrainian nation. Adherents do not see value in the existing bilingualism in Ukraine, advocating for the gradual transformation of Ukraine into a monolingual country (ibid). The war has reified and strengthened their conviction that Ukraine should be a

monolingual country and the use of Russian should be gradually phased out. The language issue remained to be politically charged in post Maidan Ukraine.

Shifting language ideologies and language use in volunteer communities

Admittedly, the re-politicization of language in post Maidan Ukraine and its use as a pretext for Russia's aggression destabilized existing language ideologies at the grassroots level. Changes were visible in volunteer communities, with my respondents talking excessively about the language situation in Ukraine and sharing their opinions about proper language policies and discussing their language preferences. Many reported an increased symbolic, emotive and national identification with Ukrainian. Attitudinal changes, however, were not homogeneous, and volunteers had different opinions about the use and value of Russian and Ukrainian. This section examines these ideological and communicative shifts, looking first at the linguistic profile of volunteers and language ideologies they espoused before the war. It then examines the shifts in volunteers' language ideologies and sociolinguistic practices, noting ruptures that occurred amidst war and continuities that persist in its aftermath.

Linguistic profile of volunteers

The linguistic profile of my respondents showed the predominance of Russian speakers in volunteer networks, an unsurprising finding given the prevalence of the Russian language in eastern and southern Ukraine. As indicated earlier, about three quarters of 95 interviews were conducted in Russian. In this group, about 20 volunteers reported having a good command of Ukrainian, but said they relied on Russian for everyday communication. One quarter of the interviews (over 20) were conducted in Ukrainian with respondents noting that they felt equally comfortable speaking Ukrainian or Russian. Outside the interviews, however, these respondents

reported predominantly using Russian. Only five respondents out of 95 said they exclusively used Ukrainian as their everyday language before the Maidan protests.

Ukrainophone volunteers testified to the difficulty of speaking Ukrainian in a Russophone environment. One of my respondents said her language struggles dated back to 1976 when she, a rural Ukrainophone resident, got her first job in Kharkiv. She reported having to assume a different language identity to keep her employment:

Every day, I'd leave home as a Ukrainian speaker and enter the factory as a Russian speaker. It wasn't even an option to speak Ukrainian with my superiors and colleagues. All documentation was in Russian too. Throughout the working day, I was obliged to speak Russian. At work, I didn't hear a word of Ukrainian, nothing! For 25 or 30 years, imagine! I was becoming a Russian speaker. That was the experience of Ukrainian speakers here, in Kharkiv. (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 4 June 2015)

Another respondent, a Dnipropetrovs'k born volunteer, talked about the frequent questioning he encountered in public with many assuming that he comes from "somewhere else" based on the fact that he spoke Ukrainian, nor Russian. He emphasized that speaking Ukrainian was seen a marker of "foreignness" to the city with Ukrainian speakers often feeling alienated and excessively scrutinized. As a way of showing in more explicit terms the bewilderment caused by the use of Ukrainian in Dnipropetrovs'k, my respondent cited frequent exchanges he was subjected to:

They ask me: Where are you from?

I respond: What kind of question is this? From Ukraine.

They ask: Well, where did you come from? Where do you live?

Me: Frunze Street.

They: What city is it?

Me: Dnipropetrovs'k, Frunze Street!

They: Then why do you speak Ukrainian?

Me: Well, I am a Ukrainian!

They found it very bizarre or even extraordinary that someone from Dnipropetrovs'k speaks Ukrainian", he concluded.

(Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs'k, 8 August 2015)

This respondent also noted that he switched to Ukrainian in adulthood, treating it as a personal challenge. He realized the importance of the language switch only afterwards, noting that it reshaped his attitudes to language and national identity in a way he did not anticipate. During childhood, he had been discouraged from using Ukrainian because of its low status:

I used to hear Ukrainian in the village when visiting my grandma and I knew it in a way. But when you switch to Ukrainian after the summer vacations in the village, children would point at you and mock you. Since childhood, I had a fear of speaking Ukrainian. To conquer that fear, I switched to Ukrainian in my adulthood. This is the way I first became Ukrainophone and later Ukrainian. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs'k, 8 August 2015)

Echoing the stories of Ukrainian speakers about being teased and their identities being questioned, many of my respondents talked about the low status attributed to Ukrainian when discussing their choice of language prior to the war. While Ukrainian made some gains in Russian speaking regions of Ukraine after independence and its status generally became elevated, many residents still perceived it as having less prestige than Russian. Ukrainian was associated with low levels of education, the peasantry and a rural lifestyle. Russian, in contrast, was associated with an urban lifestyle and culture (Bilaniuk 2005). Many of my respondents held these views before the Maidan protests and the outbreak of war. As a volunteer from Kharkiv remarked: “I was born in the Soviet Union, I used to go to a Russian school, learned Russian there. I never learned Ukrainian. I was told that only village dwellers (seliuky) speak Ukrainian. Everyone else speaks Russian. I finished my education and got two university degrees in Russian. The books I read were in Russian.” Sentiments in other regions were identical: “Who was speaking “the language (yazyk)””? Only rural residents, along with those from western Ukraine. In southern Ukraine, nobody! If you hear someone speaking Ukrainian here, you associate them with the village, always!” commented a volunteer from Odesa. Some respondents said Ukrainian was perceived as

“a scum language,” “a cattle language” (teliyachy yazyk) or a “khokhol language”, creating an environment where they were discouraged from learning and speaking it. As language has social utility, it indexes a person’s identity, social status and relation with others (Blommaert 2005; Irvine and Gal 2009). By stating their attitudes about language, my respondents articulated the language ideologies they espoused before the war. As these statements reveal, the language ideologies primarily disadvantaged Ukrainian speakers who would be ascribed the status of villagers or associated with lower levels of education based on their language use.

The outbreak of war and the instrumentalized use of Russian language disturbed existing language ideologies and, to a lesser extent, caused ruptures in sociolinguistic practices among my respondents. Putin’s conception of Russian speakers as “ontologically loyal to Russia” (Arel 2017: 3) and his rhetoric about the “protection” of Russian speakers in Ukraine elicited strong resentment among the Russophone volunteers I interviewed. Many talked about the absurdity of claims that Russian speakers were under threat in Ukraine and noted they never experienced discrimination based on language use. In fact, many agreed that Ukrainian, not Russian, has been disadvantaged in their region. The assertion that Russian speakers are oppressed or “forbidden” to speak Russian drew attention to the political use of language. There seemed to be a consensus that the language question was used instrumentally as a pretext for Crimea’s annexation. As a result, some of my respondents adamantly resisted these discourses, revisited their attitudes towards Russian and Ukrainian and changed their sociolinguistic practices to a certain degree.

These changes disturbed existing language ideologies in Ukraine and generated new discourses on language and nationality in relation to the war. The most notable pertain to the positioning of Russian as the language of the enemy, the securitization of language as an issue directly related to the state’s security and the authentication of Russian speakers as legitimate

members of the Ukrainian nation in view of their war engagement. I discuss these new discourses in more detail noting how they are linked to the conceptualization of nation and the articulation of state allegiance. I show the contradictory impact of war on the language identities of volunteers and the affects it had on their sense of language belonging.

Russian as a language of the enemy

A relatively small percentage, six volunteers out of 95, switched from Russian to Ukrainian as the main language of communication during and after the Maidan protests. Two explained their decision to switch to Ukrainian is a way to protest Russia's claims that Russian speakers embrace Russian culture and belong to the Russian sphere of influence. "They say that if we speak Russian, we are Russians", remarked one of my respondents. "We have to switch to Ukrainian to resist that. This is our language, our culture. Russian is the language of our aggressor and we spread it by speaking it". Along similar lines, another respondent said:

The use of Ukrainian language is on the rise in Kharkiv. We even had a saying here: "Let's switch to Ukrainian so that nobody will come to 'save' us". You know, Putin said that southern and eastern Ukraine had to be 'saved' because we are Russian speakers. He didn't think that there would be such a strong resistance against this. If Ukraine has to be saved, the way to do it is to make Kharkiv Ukrainian. (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 6 June 2015)

As the comment suggests, many changes in attitudes to Russian occurred directly in response to Putin's rhetoric about Russian speakers belonging to the Russian cultural sphere (Russkii mir). My respondents wanted to distance themselves from Russia, and language was key in doing so. Some even reconceptualized Russian as "a language of the enemy." The adherents of this view felt that the right thing to do was to abandon speaking Russian altogether, as it was "tainted" by the recent aggression and war. Notably, the language practices of these volunteers shifted simultaneously with language ideologies. Individuals enacting these changes saw the use of language not only as a personal choice, but also as a form of political engagement and resistance.

Changed attitudes towards Russian were also noticeable in the statements of Ukrainophones who switched to Russian in the past, after moving to cities where Russian dominated. They regretted the carelessness with which they transitioned to Russian, stressing that their views on language use were no longer the same. For example, a volunteer who moved to Crimea from western Ukraine in 1991 said that she switched to Russian because “that’s the way things worked there. It was just common sense and I didn’t pay much attention to it, even though I should have. If I moved to Crimea in 1991 having today’s views and experiences, I would have never allowed myself to speak Russian there. I see it differently now.” Similarly, another volunteer, a teacher of Ukrainian in Crimea, wished she had worked even harder cultivating love for the Ukrainian language among her pupils. She said that she too revisited her views on language use, regretting not paying attention to it in the past. These individuals had come to see language use as an expression of a political stance and manifestation of loyalty to the state. They embraced the views linking language use to state loyalty. Here, we can see how language use is politicized “from below” in response to political developments in the country and the outbreak of war.

A minority of volunteers went further, framing the use of Russian in Ukraine as an existential threat to Ukraine’s statehood. Two of them, Ukrainophones from Kharkiv and Odesa, pointed out that the conception of the “Russian world” (Russkii mir) hinges on the centrality of the Russian language. They stressed that those spaces where Russian language dominates in the public sphere are under the threat of invasion by Russia-backed military units. In light of this, they insisted on framing the use of Russian not as a matter of preference, but as a matter of national security. Switching to Ukrainian was seen not as a personal choice, but as a necessity to ensure the survival of the Ukrainian state. They argued that the Ukrainization of Russian speakers would contribute to the informational security of Ukraine and act as a shield from “Russia’s propaganda

machinery.” Particularly, they raised the issue of military intelligence as an area where switching to Ukrainian would act as a deterrent from invasive information gathering by Russian military personnel and improve the security situation in Ukraine.

The trend among some volunteers, then, was to construct a link between language and national security, framing the use of Ukrainian as risk management aimed at reducing the threat of intervention. As scholars of securitization observe, security is never an objective condition; rather, it emerges through particular “speech acts” that elevate the issue above normal political logic (Williams, 2011: 453). In the case of language, as the logic goes, the prevalence of Ukrainian language in public is to be ensured above anything else, because the Ukrainian nation might cease to exist otherwise. This framing directly links language, invasion, and annihilation, amplifying the state of extremity in relation to language. This has important normative implications for the treatment of the Russian speaking population in Ukraine and the conduct of social life more generally. As one of my respondents concluded, “In our complicated case, we need to make sure that the usage of the Russian language is phased out as fast as possible to get ourselves out the potential threat of “brotherly” protection” (Fieldwork, Odesa, 12 July 2015).

Those supporting a securitizing framework linked language use and separatist sentiments. In this view, the “true patriots of Ukraine” identify with the Ukrainian language, just as they do with other attributes of Ukrainian statehood, such as the Ukrainian flag and anthem. Those who reject, resist or disrespect the Ukrainian language “are just covert separatists and it makes no sense to seek compromises with people like that”, one of my respondents noted. Interestingly, both volunteers mentioned above who supported the securitization framework acknowledged the high presence of Russophone soldiers and volunteer fighters at the front fighting for Ukraine and noted that most of their social circle is Russian-speaking. Yet they still insisted on

a link between self-identification as Ukrainian and language use. They implicitly referred to Russophones as unintentionally complicit in reproducing Russia's influence, putting them in opposition to the Ukrainian state. While the discourses linking language use with national security are not new in Ukraine, the outbreak of war and Russia's role seemed to have revitalized and strengthened them among some Ukrainians.

The authentication of Russian speakers through war engagement

While a link between language, security and patriotism was visible, new discourses decoupling language, nationality and state loyalty emerged as well. A few of my respondents separated language belonging and national belonging, stating that the language a person uses does not reflect the way he or she "feels." Rather, national sentiments "come from the heart" and should not be extrapolated from language use. In other words, these respondents stressed that the right national belonging comes from emotionally identifying with the land, with the state and the people, regardless of language practices or preferences. During interviews, this interpretation was predominantly, but not exclusively, advanced by Russian speakers who strengthened their sense of national belonging through war engagement and adopted other attributes of Ukrainian statehood, but found it difficult and sometimes unnecessary to switch to Ukrainian.

The war provided a space to legitimize Russian speakers through their contributions to the war effort. A notable number of volunteers, both Ukrainian and Russian speakers, had come to associate loyalty to the country with actions in support of it. In these narratives, the language a person speaks and a self-defined nationality become less relevant if allegiance to Ukraine is shown through actions. They posited that language was not an indication of patriotism anymore and what mattered was a person's political stance and the willingness to work towards a common future. The proponents of this view referenced their friends of various nationalities who were engaged in

wartime volunteering and noted that these actions positioned them as “true Ukrainians.” They stressed that this was especially the case because these actions were aimed at preserving Ukrainian statehood. Discussing the high presence of Russian speakers on the front, three of my interviewees remarked:

If you are ready to die for this country and kill for this country, you are Ukrainian. It makes little sense to measure one’s loyalty to the country based on the language one speaks. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 8 July 2015)

The conflict between the Russian and Ukrainian languages became of little meaning to me. To the contrary, I don’t support forceful Ukrainization. The majority of soldiers on the frontlines are Russian speakers. They died fighting for Ukraine... (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs’k, 12 August 2015)

These narratives redefine patriotism and state loyalty through action: “doing”, “fighting” and “contributing”, not “speaking Ukrainian” or “being ethnically Ukrainian.” The intensive engagement of Russian speakers in the volunteer networks and volunteer battalions erased the perception that only Ukrainian speakers were truly loyal to Ukraine, decreasing the salience of language as a signal of patriotism. As a result, the use of Russian became disassociated from cultural and political allegiance to Russia.

One effect of the decoupling of language and national belonging was strengthened resistance to “forced Ukrainization” among some volunteers. Ivan, a volunteer from Dnipropetrovs’k, captured the sentiment expressed by a number of my respondents:

I am absolutely against those who call themselves patriots and force everyone to speak exclusively Ukrainian. I am a patriot. I speak Russian, but I have done so much for this country! And they are saying that as soon as we all switch to Ukrainian, all problems will be resolved... Our past and present politicians are fluent in Ukrainian. Has it done us any good? Are we a prosperous country? We are going down! The bottom line is that if you speak Ukrainian, it doesn’t have any bearing on what kind of a citizen you are. I will be the first one to resist forceful Ukrainization. If someone tells me that I have to speak Ukrainian – I’ll tell them to go to hell. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs’k, 14 August 2015)

The volunteers who espoused this view still saw value in increasing the use of Ukrainian in public life. Their main disagreement was not about the use of Ukrainian per se, which was seen favourably, but the rejection of a link between language and state loyalty. They opposed the idea of the unintentional complicity of Russophones in spreading Russia's influence, voiced by the proponents of a language securitization narrative. They also pointed out that speaking Russian did not mean thinking like a "separatist," de-essentializing language use and disconnecting it from the way one feels or thinks. Instead, they stressed the importance of a "common vision" for Ukraine's future. As one volunteer stated: "The focus should be on our land, our children, our future. These are things that unite us. There are lots of language radicals right now, but this is something that divides us and can potentially destroy what we have" (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs'k, 5 August 2015). The emphasis on a "common vision" provided a unifying discourse for nation-making, positioning Russian and Ukrainian speakers as part of the same nation, with the same goals and undertakings regardless of the language use.

By and large, the decoupling of language and nationality and linking national belonging to the idea of a "common future," signals the authentication of Russian speakers as legitimate members of Ukrainian nation. As Smith (2001) notes, the key concept of national identity is authenticity, achieved through the construction of a continuity with a nation's history. Proposing a "common vision" as a uniting symbol for Ukrainians embracing different language identities serves to articulate forward looking continuity claims and directs attention away from language diversity to other aspects of Ukraine's social and political life. Arguably, the war on Donbas presented an opportunity for Russophone Ukrainians to articulate a new version of the myth of national unity, one revolving around allegiance to the nation and the state through action. Decoupling language and state loyalty has become the new default position from which some are

willing to renegotiate language politics in Ukraine. Their contributions to the war effort provide the moral grounds for doing so.

Increased cultural, national and symbolic identification with Ukrainian

As a result of recent upheavals and war, most of my respondents revisited their previous opinion of Ukrainian as of lower value and revised their views about its role and function in Ukraine. These re-evaluations were reinforced by the strengthened national identification that many had experienced since the outbreak of war. Two of my respondents had transitioned to Ukrainian, noting that “the language you speak shapes your ways of thinking.” They saw the language switch as a way of increasing their “national consciousness” and rootedness in Ukrainian culture. This type of framing indicates a strong link between nationality and language identities, with Ukrainian seen as an important marker of national identification and awareness. It implies that Ukrainian speakers are perceived as more culturally “Ukrainian,” in possession of a greater cultural capital. In such instances, the Ukrainian language is still constructed as a cultural boundary of the nation-making project.

Bernsand (2001) argues that conceiving language as an integral part of national identification is typical among those using an ethnonationalist framework; he explains that “what differentiates the nationalist language ideology from other Ukrainophone strands of thought on language and national identity is the sheer emphasis on Nation and Language as values in themselves, values that are often discussed quite independently from the individual members of the nation and speakers of the language” (2001:17). The Ukrainian nation has been conceptualized through language since the 19th century, and a romanticizing and essentializing link between language and nation became accepted by many as common sense. The Soviet Union institutionalized nationhood and nationality, reinforcing an ethnocultural understanding of nation;

its legacy continues to linger in the successor states (Brubaker 1994) and remains to shape the ways some of my respondents conceive of themselves.

The heightened attention to language amidst increased national identification has resulted in some Russophone Ukrainians embracing ethnonationalist views. This is visible in the two cases, cited above, of language switching to “increase national consciousness”. Other Russophone volunteers implicitly embraced this stance when they said they couldn’t consider themselves genuine Ukrainians, since they did not speak Ukrainian. Oksana, one of my respondents puts it this way:

Ethnically, my mother is Ukrainian and my father is Jewish. I am a Russophone, even though I understand Ukrainian well. I always identified with Ukraine. This is my country! When the pro-Russia and pro-Ukraine split happened, I never questioned what side to support. I can’t say that I am a big patriot, though... I can’t say... I can’t say that I knew Ukrainian (yazyk) perfectly. We only studied it at school, that’s it. Odesa is a Russian speaking city. It has always been. The number of hours for studying Ukrainian at school was similar to that allocated to other foreign languages. Very few. That’s why *I can’t say that I am a genuine Ukrainian and that I speak exclusively Ukrainian* (emphasis added). It’s not true. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 8 July 2015)

Remarkably, Oksana did not feel she was a genuine Ukrainian, even though she, her parents and grandparents were born in Odesa. Since the nationalist language ideology puts language associated with the nation at the heart of national belonging, it positions Russian speakers as lacking national authenticity. To a degree, Oksana internalized the ethnonationalist views on language, feeling somewhat alienated and uprooted culturally. At the same time, she did not consider it necessary to invest effort in aligning her national and language identities, at least not at the time of the interview. New discourses of decoupling language and nationality absolved her from thinking of a language switch and allowed her to emphasize “love for the country” instead. Put otherwise, the need to switch to Ukrainian was tempered by the emerging discourses of state loyalty through action.

Iterations of discourses on “cultural uprootedness,” however, did play a role in the ways Russophone volunteers thought about their language belonging. One indicated her intention to switch to Ukrainian in the future to nourish her attachment to Ukraine, suggesting that Soviet policies had weakened it:

I speak Russian right now, but if someone addresses me in Ukrainian, I switch. I’ve decided for myself that eventually I will switch to Ukrainian. For so many years, we have been uprooted from our lands, we lived in rented apartments, had temporary registration. We all became people with ‘propyska’. As a result, people don’t feel attached to this land. *We need to engrain it at the very primal level* (emphasis added).⁴⁴ Only then we can layer on cosmopolitan views, freedoms and so on. Building a nation is the first step towards it. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs’k, 8 August 2015)

Notably, this respondent claimed that attachment to Ukraine should be engrained into members of the nation at the very primal level. She saw language as key in engineering the connection between land, nation and individuals. As Bernsand (2001) notes, this is exactly how language ideologies work to produce identity narratives – by relating language forms to community and nation. While an ethnonationalist ideology has been present in Ukraine for a long time, the testimonies of some volunteers suggest that the war caused it to resonate among Russophone Ukrainians to a stronger degree.

Along with increased cultural identification with Ukrainian, a crystallized allegiance to the Ukrainian state reaffirmed the symbolic importance of the Ukrainian language among volunteers. My respondents unilaterally stated that Ukrainian should remain the sole state language. Many expressed the opinion that everyone who lives in Ukraine should be obliged to learn Ukrainian over time, even if they do not use it for everyday communication, because “it’s

⁴⁴ Propyska’ refers to the restrictive residence permit system institutionalized in the Soviet Union to restrict migration in the Union’s most livable regions and keep track of its citizens more generally (Rubins 1998).

the state language.” Noting an elevated social status of Ukrainian in the regions where Russian dominates, one of the volunteers commented:

There is a newly emerged respect for the Ukrainian language among those who don't speak it. They don't devalue it anymore. There is a clear understanding now that the Ukrainian language is an attribute of Ukrainian statehood, even if Russian is used for everyday communication. The Ukrainian language has become fashionable, it's trendy! And that's great! Before, the Ukrainian language in Kharkiv was seen as idiocy, but it's really changing. (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 10 June 2015)

The symbolic importance of Ukrainian was also expressed through opposition to the idea of re-establishing the status of Russian as a regional language. Many of my respondents found it unnecessary or unacceptable altogether. Some said it would further undermine the status of Ukrainian in regions where Russian dominates, making it disappear altogether. Others argued that Russian should retain the status of a national minority language, like other languages spoken in Ukraine, with no special treatment. Only two of my respondents thought there should be a more nuanced approach to the status of Russian. Regionally, they noted, Russian speakers should be allowed to exchange written documents in Russian but communication with national state officials should be conducted in Ukrainian. This was seen as particularly important to accommodate the older generation, who were less likely to transition to Ukrainian.

The symbolic and practical importance of Ukrainian was visible in discussions of the educational system of Ukraine. Most volunteers noted that their children had been schooled in Ukrainian and possessed a much better command of the language than they did. Some said they transferred their children from Russian speaking sections to Ukrainian speaking sections, because “the Ukrainian language is the future of Ukraine.” Many thought that with their children going to Ukrainian language schools and kindergarten facilities, the language issue in Ukraine would resolve itself naturally with the next generation. “I switch back and forth between Ukrainian and

Russian. It's difficult for me to speak exclusively Ukrainian, but my daughter has no problems with this. She speaks Ukrainian fluently," remarked a volunteer from Dnipropetrovs'k. The perception that the inter-generational shift will naturally resolve the language question in Ukraine made some of my respondents feel that the "older generation," including themselves, should not be obliged to change language practices in any way.

When asked about their intent to switch to Ukrainian in the future, a number of Russophone volunteers indicated an intent to do so, but stressed that transitioning to Ukrainian should happen over time, without restrictions on speaking Russian. They noted that transitioning to Ukrainian would require a time and energy commitment that was difficult to combine with the pressures of volunteering. My respondents saw Russian as a language of convenience that allowed them to function and communicate more efficiently. They prioritized their work over their language considerations. In this context, switching to Ukrainian was seen as a long-term commitment that many planned to take on when the war ended. Some said they had already located Ukrainian language training programs and intended to sign up after the war.⁴⁵ Others reported incremental changes, like switching to Ukrainian on social media and internet forums or giving preference to reading newspapers and listening to music in Ukrainian.

While a sizeable number of volunteers discussed their intention of eventually switching to Ukrainian, a reverse trend was also present. The feeling that the survival of Ukrainian is no longer threatened by Russian made two of my respondents more willing to use Russian in everyday communication. They explained this decision by saying that Ukrainian was no longer threatened

⁴⁵ In Dnipropetrovs'k, volunteers began free Ukrainian language courses for the internally displaced (U Dnipri Volontery 2016). Discussions of free language courses among volunteers were ongoing in Odesa during my fieldwork. A respondent from Kharkiv said she had organized language courses in the city before the war and planned to resume them when the war-related workload subsides. While language was not seen as a priority amidst war engagement, conversations about spaces to practice and use Ukrainian were quite common.

in the Russian speaking regions and its usage had ceased to be an act of resistance against Russification of Ukraine. One of my respondents from Odesa detailed her language use trajectory, saying she switched to Ukrainian in 2012 to protest the language law that gave Russian the status of a regional language, approving its use in courts, schools and other government institutions in regions with a Russian-speaking majority. Back then, it was “a principled position to speak Ukrainian as the law made the usage of Ukrainian obsolete, favouring Russian language in all governmental institutions,” she noted. In her eyes, the Maidan protests and the outbreak of war changed the perception that the Ukrainian language was on the verge of extinction and depoliticized the choice of language: “You know, switching back to Russian happened very naturally for me. The language issue became much less acute in post Maidan Ukraine. It lost its political appeal. Many more people in Odesa take interest in Ukrainian language and culture after the Maidan.” Another respondent added that the language question became less relevant in Ukraine when “everyone realized that it was used for political manipulation and the claims about the persecution of Russian speaking Ukrainians were complete nonsense.” As these examples illustrate, increased social openness to Ukrainian has marginally led some to switch back to Russian or treat the language use more lightly, easily transitioning between the two languages.

On a broader scale, two implications of the increased social openness to Ukrainian in volunteer communities should be highlighted. The first is that Russian seems to be losing the prestige it enjoyed historically, with Russophone volunteers increasingly identifying with Ukrainian culturally and emotionally. This signifies a profound shift in language ideologies and language belonging of volunteers. The second implication is that the relationship between increased social openness to Ukrainian and sociolinguistic practices of volunteers is not straightforward. My fieldwork findings suggest that an elevated social openness to Ukrainian did

not automatically translate into the use of Ukrainian, but elicited a more subtle responses at the sociolinguistic level. Among them, changed dynamics in non-accommodating bilingualism in Ukraine and a slight de-stigmatisation of language mixing were most visible. I review these incremental changes in language use in the next section, focusing on the role of war and war engagement in it.

Language ‘on the move’: war mobility and socializing

The war created a new context within which language negotiations and interactions could take place. This context has been favourable to the use of Ukrainian and have allowed Russophone volunteers to increasingly use Ukrainian words or switch to Ukrainian altogether. In some instances, the volunteer sites acted as spaces where Russophone volunteers felt encouraged to practice Ukrainian and use it for everyday interactions outside of volunteering.

As stated in the theoretical chapter, language use is affected by different forms of mobility and everyday settings. Particularly, Jaworski and Thurlow (2011) observe that travelling has an inevitable effect on the sociolinguistic realities of those “on the move,” allowing people to renegotiate their linguistic identities through encounters with new places and people. They contend that the language accompanying the speaker interacts with new environments and becomes “re-contextualized” and “re-emotized.” New forms of mobility and sociality have the potential of producing new linguistic landscapes, affecting individuals’ socio-linguistic practices. My findings suggest that this has been the case in volunteer communities as many volunteers made new friends on the front and away, changed their habitual settings amidst war and subsequently altered their language practices.

Chapter 6 on National Identities illustrated that new forms of mobility and inter-regional cooperation emerged in wartime. Increased inter-regional cooperation and frequent travels to the

front influenced the sociolinguistic practices of my respondents. Two examples illustrate the effect of war socializing on language use. The first is Ksenia, a woman from Dnipropetrovs'k touring the frontlines with concerts and performances. She referenced her trips to the war zone as a reason for increasingly using Ukrainian. She stated that many combatants at the front were speaking Ukrainian: "Many of them! To my surprise! When I started speaking Ukrainian with them, I realized that I couldn't stop." Similarly, Olena, a Kharkiv-born Russophone psychologist indicated an increased usage of Ukrainian because of her volunteer work:

During the last year or so, I have predominantly worked with Ukrainian speaking combatants from the L'viv battalion as a psychologist. I switch languages all the time. I've got used to speaking Ukrainian now. To the extent that recently a Russian speaking soldier told me to stick to Ukrainian if it is easier, because I kept inserting Ukrainian words while speaking Russian. When I spend time with a Ukrainian speaking battalion, it feels weird to switch back to Russian. (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 10 June 2015)

In both cases, war engagement, not war itself, became facilitated language switching. War mobility presented new opportunities for Russophone volunteers to communicate and build close ties with Ukrainophone combatants. One effect of this was a situational or permanent language switch to Ukrainian with the use of Russian as the language of everyday communication becoming partially or fully displaced. Notably, it is predominantly female respondents who felt an urge to switch to Ukrainian when communicating with Ukrainian speaking combatants. One respondent mentioned that she made an extra effort to switch to Ukrainian when volunteering at the hospital and assisting the Ukrainophone combatants from western regions of Ukraine. As I discovered, hospital volunteering and other volunteer-related activities created a new context within which language switching was enabled and deemed appropriate.

These snippets are indicative of the gendered dynamics in language use when Ukrainian language becomes "re-emotized" in wartime interactions with Russophone female volunteers

using specific linguistic registers and language in addressing Ukrainophone soldiers. Language switch is one way through which female volunteers express care and accommodate those men who fight on the front and suffer the consequences of war. Given the intensity and frequency of these exchanges, such linguistic accommodation is productive for the reordering of language identities among the volunteers. New structures of feelings and attachment that arise amidst war can play a crucial role in facilitating new socio-linguistic practices among volunteers.

War socialization also intensified the discussions of language in the volunteer milieu, making volunteers and combatants renegotiate their sociolinguistic identities. Natalia, a Russophone volunteer from Dnipropetrovs'k, is a good illustration. Since the outset of war, she had been helping Pravyi Sektor, a volunteer battalion known for its nationalist views. Its rhetoric about a “united” Ukraine and the dominance of Ukrainian language and culture resonated with Natalia’s own vision of Ukraine’s future, but conflicted with her present language practices. Natalia said she frequently insisted that language belonging itself is a poor indicator of national belonging and resisted the jokingly imposed definition of her as “a separatist.” She invested effort into articulating her own position to combatants, claiming that “a common vision” is a better measure of patriotism and “Ukrainianness.” Having established authority and gained respect through volunteering, Natalia advocated for increased language tolerance among those she assisted, at least temporarily. Gendered solidarities underpin these negotiations and have the potential of making combatants more perceptive to the views of female volunteers, who are credited for unwavering support and care. This example points to the fact that language use is mediated through gender solidarities, resulting in shifts in language ideologies at the grassroots level. This change, undeniably, occurs within a national framework of thinking and in relation to the existing language ideologies in Ukraine.

In the short term, we can observe language negotiations taking place in war-torn communities. These communities are characterized by sociolinguistic diversity with Russophone and Ukrainophone getting together to address new war realities. Language discussions have the potential of shifting existent language ideologies and create space for the reordering of language identities. In the short term, these conversations could lead to Russophone volunteers negotiating a higher degree of language tolerance for Russian speakers. In the long term, it might lead to Russophone volunteers embracing the dominant language ideology and encourage them to revise their sociolinguistic practices accordingly. While the exact impact of these negotiations is difficult to estimate, they point to the importance of war milieu in shifting the dynamics of language negotiations in a way that is favorable to Ukrainian.

Shifts in language (non)accommodation practices

It is not only interactions with combatants that impact the sociolinguistic identities of volunteers. Some Russophone respondents indicated that their social circles had substantially expanded over the course of volunteering, becoming more diverse linguistically. Many established connections and friendships with those speaking Ukrainian either in their cities of residence or other cities across Ukraine. Some reported using these contacts to improve their competence in Ukrainian and use it as “a push” to switch to Ukrainian more often in daily communication. A few remarked that they “always try to catch someone speaking Ukrainian” to practice and learn from them. Others said they insisted their interlocutors from western regions not switch to Russian when communicating with them, even when communication happened over the phone. As these examples suggest, the dynamics of linguistic accommodation have shifted amidst the war.

Non-accommodating bilingual interactions have been common in Ukraine, with people adhering to their preferred language, especially in public and the media (Bilaniuk and Melnyk

2008). In cases where linguistic accommodation does take place, Ukrainian speakers used to switch to Russian, based on the assumption that Russian, not Ukrainian, was spoken by everyone. Recent developments and war socializing have reversed these dynamics of linguistic non-accommodation, at least among the volunteers. My findings suggest that Russophone volunteers demonstrate a higher degree of willingness to linguistically accommodate Ukrainian speakers, a reversal of the former trend whereby Ukrainian speakers would accommodately switch to Russian. A few of my respondents said they teach their children to respond in the language of their interlocutor, a tendency that implies Russian speakers accommodated Ukrainian interlocutors. As one of my respondents explained, she told her daughter it is “a disgrace” not to do so, living in Ukraine. Some also reported switching to Ukrainian more frequently when addressed in Ukrainian.

In addition, Russophone volunteers insist that their Ukrainian interlocutors not switch to Russian to accommodate them, often because they didn't see it appropriate:

When I call someone in western Ukraine, Ternopil' or Ivano-Frankivs'k asking “girls” to help me assemble packages to the front, they immediately switch to Russian. I call them out on this – why are you switching to Russian? If I can't speak Ukrainian, it doesn't mean that they need to accommodate me! I understand them perfectly well and they should speak the language they prefer. If they prefer speaking Ukrainian, they should do so! Russian is my native language and I don't feel the urge to reject it. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 4 July 2015)

Another volunteer made a similar observation about interlocutors from western Ukraine and their readiness to switch to Russian:

They always ask me what language I prefer – Russian or Ukrainian? Because they are ready to accommodate me! I tell you that nobody from the Russian speaking regions would switch to Ukrainian to accommodate me if I were a Ukrainian speaker... Nobody! (Fieldwork, Odesa, 12 July 2015)

Their remarks indicate that some individuals have started paying closer attention to language dynamics. As a result, practices of language accommodation have become more visible, questioned and occasionally adjusted. In many instances, an increased attention to language

accommodation led Russophones to see Ukrainian speakers as more tolerant and considerate of their preferences, something that my respondents sought to reciprocate. In a few instances, they insisted their interlocutors not switch to Russian because they wanted to “learn proper Ukrainian from them,” a normatively-loaded framing that indicates the positioning of Ukrainian speakers as speaking a “pure” language. I return to this question later in the chapter when discussing surzhyk – language mixing that has been prevalent in Ukraine.

Changes in non-accommodating bilingualism were equally visible to Ukrainophone volunteers. They all stressed the absence of necessity to linguistically accommodate; as they said, everyone understood Ukrainian, even if it was not their primary language. Some even remarked that the linguistic accommodation of Russian speakers was “insulting” and implied a low IQ. “In Kharkiv, there are no people who don’t understand Ukrainian,” remarked one of my respondents. “People are smart enough here and have the intellectual capacity to understand both languages, even if they don’t use both in everyday communication. Linguistically accommodating them is demeaning, really.” In this sense, non-accommodating bilingualism in volunteer communities has become more prevalent, with Russian speakers adjusting their practices to accommodate Ukrainian speakers, not the other way around. The burden of bilingualism might have shifted in favour of Ukrainian speakers in the volunteer communities.

While a thorough sociolinguistic analysis of communicative practices is required to understand the shifts in linguistic (non)accommodation, my findings suggest the war has changed language sensitivities and sensibilities in volunteer communities. First, Russian speakers increasingly take note of language dynamics between Russian and Ukrainian speakers, seeking to reciprocate the linguistic accommodation hitherto exhibited by Ukrainian speakers. Second, changing patterns of linguistic interactions are legitimized in favour of Ukrainian. In this sense,

new forms of linguistic (non)accommodation result in Russian speakers embracing the dominant language ideology that posits Ukrainian as the legitimate language of Ukrainians.

Shifts in attitudes towards surzhyk

If volunteers demonstrate a greater social openness to Ukrainian and a growing willingness to accommodate Ukrainian speakers, what are the main barriers that keep them away from speaking Ukrainian? Why had only six switched to Ukrainian since the outbreak of war? Many of my respondents referenced an anxiety of speaking “bad Ukrainian” or surzhyk – a language mix of Ukrainian and Russian as something that prevents them from switching to Ukrainian:

I have always been against surzhyk. If someone switches to Ukrainian here, it’s mostly surzhyk. I think that if you want to learn a language, learn it right. I know Russian very well. I speak it correctly and know the grammar well. I don’t want to learn faulty Ukrainian and sound illiterate. What for? At the same time, I think that at my age it’s hard to learn Ukrainian perfectly. I think I would need to work with a Ukrainian language tutor to learn a good quality Ukrainian. For basic communication, I can speak surzhyk, but I don’t want to. (Dnipropetrovs’k, Fieldwork, 19 August 2015)

I can speak Ukrainian, but my son tells me not to. He says “You speak Ukrainian very badly. Your pronunciation is very harsh. It doesn’t sound nice”. That’s why I don’t speak it. (Odesa, Fieldwork, 6 July 2015)

I really like Ukrainian, but when it’s spoken correctly. It sounds very soft and beautiful then. When I visit western Ukraine, Ukrainian sounds like a song. We can’t speak like that because we produce surzhyk. (Odesa, Fieldwork, 12 July 2015)

As these statements illustrate, the categorization of language and what constitutes “good” and “bad” Ukrainian featured prominently in my respondents’ accounts. Speaking “proper Ukrainian” was important for the volunteers I interviewed; they did not want to appear “illiterate” by making mistakes in Ukrainian. Some said they expected their interlocutors to also speak “correct” Ukrainian, not distorting the language. Others noted that their friends or relatives shut

down their attempts to practice Ukrainian by commenting on its impurity and harshness. A few confided that they considered surzhyk to be their native language since it was the language they spoke with their parents from childhood. Growing up, they came to associate it with “faultiness,” the perception that many others shared.

As Bernsand (2001) reminds us, linguistic variations or language mixing such as surzhyk do not carry any significance or abnormality in themselves. Linguistic transgressions are not “ridiculous” or “illiterate” per se, as many of my respondents indicated. Language ideologies give social meaning to linguistic diversity and structure relations between language varieties and link them to social status, and perceived relations with other people. Given this indexicality, language discussions and problems are emblematic of identity processes and hierarchies. Writing or speaking incorrectly produces “strong indexicalities of abnormality, of non-membership of the ideal member categories defining the language” (Blommaert 2005: 5) and can lead to negative sanctioning. An important quality of language ideologies is that they work through misrecognition, where linguistic forms that do not conform to the dominant language ideologies are seen as a “problem” to be corrected or eliminated (Blommaert and Rampton 2012). The urge to eliminate or “take out” these forms is emblematic of socio-political processes aimed at “correcting” certain types of identities perceived as faulty or socially undesirable.

In Ukraine, a heightened preoccupation with linguistic pureness and correctness should be understood as a response to skepticism about the legitimacy of the Ukrainian language (Bilaniuk 2005). Discussions on which language forms should be accepted as normative in Standard Ukrainian first arose in the 19th century. These discussions among cultural entrepreneurs were significant not so much for language standardization, but more profoundly for whether Ukrainian and Russian represent separate languages or different dialect systems of the same all-Russian

language (Bernsand 2001: 40). Because two languages came to be conceptualized as separate systems, Ukrainian language activists worked to create a clear-cut boundary between them (ibid). Language mixing was perceived as unacceptable because it blurred the boundary between the two languages and questioned the legitimacy of Ukrainian. Concerns about the correctness of the language were amplified by the “myth of homogeneity” of the nation; in this myth, people are expected to adhere to the same linguistic standards for the sake of national homogeneity and coherence (Bilaniuk 2005). This concern resurfaced in independent Ukraine, with Ukrainian nationalists sometimes condemning language mixing and stressing the importance of “pure” language forms to clearly delineate Ukrainian from Russian (Bernsand 2001).

While ideologically surzhyk was not recognized as a language, it became prevalent in Ukraine because of migration patterns. Language mixing gained sway during the urbanization of the Ukrainian peasantry when Ukrainophone residents increasingly moved to the cities for work. As Russian predominated in the cities and enjoyed a more prestigious status, urbanizing peasants tried to incorporate Russian words into their linguistic registers. As a result, surzhyk came to be associated with villages and a lack of education, conferring a lower social status on its speakers. The socially negative attitude towards surzhyk and increased attention to language correctness made my respondents anxious about speaking “incorrectly” and looking “ridiculous” in their attempts to use Ukrainian. As Kulyk (2011a) notes, the unequal attention to the quality of Ukrainian compared to Russian, constant evaluations of the “adequacy” of Ukrainian and unwillingness to tolerate a Ukrainian of “low quality” preserved a Russian linguistic environment and reproduced the hegemony of the Russian language in the regions where Russian dominates. Concerns of my respondents over the “purity” and “adequacy” of their Ukrainian seem to have a similar effect, hindering their use of the language.

It should be noted that volunteer networks occasionally became spaces where surzhyk was de-stigmatized and linguistic impurity was redefined as a source of pride, not embarrassment. Three of my respondents said they had developed a greater acceptance of surzhyk because, to them, it suggested a person “attempts to change their ways and switch to Ukrainian.” One even said Russian speaking Ukrainians have to come to terms with speaking surzhyk before they come to speak “pure Ukrainian,” as this is a transitional phase. Summing up these sentiments, one volunteer commented:

It’s a top-down superstition that surzhyk is bad; that it’s not a language. It makes people unwilling to switch to Ukrainian, because they will inevitably mix the two languages at the beginning and speak surzhyk. There is nothing wrong with surzhyk! People should not be embarrassed for speaking it. We should move away from the conviction that everyone should speak the same literary standard of Ukrainian to encourage people to experiment and confront their fear. (Kharkiv, Fieldwork, 24 June 2015)

Narratives like these destigmatized surzhyk and created a level of acceptability for language mixing. Occasionally, volunteer sites provided space where my respondents could speak surzhyk without feeling stigmatized for it. A volunteer network in Kharkiv exemplifies this. While I was talking with a few of these volunteers, I remarked that some of them spoke Ukrainian very well. One said they are trying their best to speak Ukrainian “out of patriotism.” Right away, she apologetically added that “of course, our Ukrainian is funny sounding. It’s language mixing (surzhyk). I bet in Canada, the Ukrainian language is purer, because you can’t mix it with English or French. When it comes to Russian and Ukrainian – there are lots of similarities”. Another volunteer joined our conversation, saying that at the volunteering center, they often switched to Ukrainian while making camouflage nets. To demonstrate their love for the Ukrainian language and culture, someone asked an elderly male volunteer to sing “The broad river Dnepr roars and moans” by Taras Shevchenko – an iconic Ukrainian poet seen as the embodiment of the Ukrainian

national idea. I was specifically asked to record the song as a testament to the patriotic aspirations of the volunteers. Right after the song, one commented:

You know, we came to see ourselves as a nation now! Our only chance for survival is coming together as a nation, regardless of the language we speak. The knowledge of Ukrainian language will follow suit. We have already started working on it. (Kharkiv, Fieldwork, 24 June 2015)

Another volunteer chimed into the conversation, stating the following:

For many volunteers in our network, Russian was the language of everyday communication. It's incredibly nice to see them switch to Ukrainian from time to time. When a Ukrainian speaking volunteer starts a conversation, they would join in Ukrainian too. Some say that they don't have enough practice in Ukrainian and suggest using Ukrainian more often during volunteering, among ourselves. We have volunteers from western Ukraine and Kyiv that know Ukrainian very well – let's take advantage of this opportunity more often. (Kharkiv, Fieldwork, 24 June 2015)

The volunteers of this network, as other respondents I interviewed, had developed an understanding that national identity comes first and the use of Ukrainian language follows suit. Even if declarative, these statements are important indications of how volunteers think of the relations between national and language identities and adjust their socio-linguistic identities based on the new understanding. Some of my respondents felt that their national identity had become unambiguously established. Language was important, but not definitive. Many indicated an intent to increase the use of Ukrainian in the future.

Conclusion

While language remains a contested issue in Ukraine, war and war engagement have unsettled existing language ideologies and reinvigorated discussions about language use, state loyalty and nation. My respondents reported a heightened symbolic and cultural identification with Ukrainian, which has become to be seen as the language of wartime solidarities and connectedness. Many Russophone volunteers had integrated war-related words into their linguistic repertoires.

These words have strong affective connotations, as they connote war, trauma, solidarity and resilience and political engagement at difficult times.

At the same time, however, the narratives of my respondents demonstrate significant differences in the ways they relate the Ukrainian language to state and national belonging. Some embraced the idea that language use has no bearing on state's loyalty, pointing to the contribution of Russophone Ukrainians to the war effort. Others had come to see Russian as the language of the enemy and framed its use in Ukraine as a security concern. These competing discourses on the relationship between language and state loyalty indicate that there is no social consensus on language at the grassroots level in Ukraine. The competing discourses signify important points of contestation and diverging views of what constitutes "the nation" and who can count as a "genuine" member of it.

My data also indicated that along persisting disagreements about language, a shift towards Ukrainian did occur in volunteer communities. The volunteers enacted various linguistic changes in response to their changed attitudes about language and altered their sociolinguistic identities to a varying degree. While only a few volunteers switched to Ukrainian, many more took incremental steps in their communicative practices. Some integrated more Ukrainian words into their vocabulary, claiming that these words had acquired a special meaning for them. A considerable number said their previous practices of linguistic non-accommodation shifted. More specifically, Russophone volunteers reported a higher willingness to accommodate Ukrainophones. War mobility and socializing played an important role in enabling these changes as it presented new contexts for Ukrainophones and Russophones to interact, creating a social milieu to the advantage of Ukrainian language. Strengthened national identification and gender

solidarities amidst war reinforce the positive attitude towards Ukrainian and generate a greater social openness to it.

Chapter 8. Citizen identity formation amidst war: “All I can think about is how to fetch things for the front”

In my research, I have had ample opportunities to talk to ordinary Ukrainians doing volunteer work to support their troops in the ongoing war on Donbas. One of these, Oksana, told me the following about her volunteerism:

Activism and active engagement is not for me. Honestly, it's not for me. I only joined because “boys” (soldiers) need help. I know when the war is over, when the peace is announced and ‘boys’ come back home, I won't be a volunteer. I won't continue with volunteering. Honestly, I am tired morally and physically. I don't see myself as a volunteer working actively in a specific area... That's one of the reasons why I took up war volunteering! I don't see myself dealing with any other issues, only with the needs of the war. All I am thinking about is where and how to fetch things for the front. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 12 July 2015)

Oksana's friend, also a war volunteer, chimed in, explaining how she sees her current and future engagement. ‘As long as my help is needed - I will help’, she said:

Once the war is over, “the boys” might need some assistance with getting back to normal life. Some of them return home seriously injured, disabled. I am ready to help. I am ready to... I don't know... clean their apartments or cook food for them. I will help those who can't work and take care of themselves anymore. I am ready to donate my labour. Anything I can do with my hands. I will keep helping as long as there is need. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 12 July 2015)

As I talked to Oksana about her wartime engagement, asking whether she had tried to elicit support from state officials to expand her capacity to help soldiers or thought of political engagement in the future, she showed no enthusiasm. She said that she had attended a few meetings at the regional council, but lost interest immediately. “You know why?” she asked me:

Because all they do is talk. After a long and exhausting discussion, we would finally arrive at a decision and then someone would question it and we would go back to where we started, reopening the discussion. I'd rather spend a few hours by the supermarket fundraising for “the boys” or embroidering an icon that I can sell and use the money to buy something for the front. I don't see anything good coming out of these conversations. Instead of taking, they should do something!

They do nothing. I feel like I am wasting my time attending those meetings. I can find better ways to spend that time. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 12 July 2015)

These two women were not isolated cases. Many of the volunteers I interviewed stressed the apolitical nature of volunteering and their disinterest in politics more generally. Many defined volunteering as “selfless action,” as “a calling of the heart” - in direct opposition to politics which was seen as “driven by self-interest,” “a dirty game,” and “the game of the powerful.” At the same time, they talked about a newly acquired sense of agency and responsibility for the well-being of their communities and Ukraine more generally, discussing the ways war changed their views about individual engagement and collective action. These transformations raise questions about the changes in the ways volunteers came to see themselves as “citizens” amidst war, the types of engagement they came to value and their lingering political apathy.

This chapter seeks to make sense of the war-induced reinterpretation of citizenship identity, examining the shifts in the ways volunteers relate to community and think of public participation. It builds upon the scholarship on citizenship identity, exploring how war can affect a sense of “citizen self” and lead to the transformations of citizen sensibilities in wartime. Drawing on the trajectories of volunteers, the chapter shows that many had a narrowly defined scope of social concerns before the war and an individualistic interpretation of “good citizenship” that precluded broader participation. Wartime engagement expanded their scope of concerns, altered their perception of own role in society and improved their attitudes towards fellow citizens. Many have abandoned their initially negative attitude towards collective action as useless and inefficient, thereby putting their citizen identity within a collective framework. Interestingly, however, attitudes about political participation remained predominantly negative. I argue that the understanding of volunteering conflicts with the understanding of politics, producing political disengagement and promoting the model of community-oriented citizenship instead.

The conceptualization of “good citizenship” prior to war

As stated in the Chapter 4 on the Demographic Profile of volunteers, only ten out of 95 reported being active in community affairs and/or political life at the local level before war. Another six volunteers considered their professional work as a venue where they acted as “citizens,” not just professionals. They understood their high professional ethics in terms of “citizen work” aimed at improving the life of others. This conception of “good citizenship” was individualistic with emphasis on personal qualities, including honesty, professional and personal integrity, hard work and incorruptibility. A few other volunteers indicated that they occasionally helped their neighbours or relatives, but did not consider it as citizen engagement. Their response to individual calls for assistance did not facilitate a broader engagement. A few respondents donated money prior to war for disadvantaged members of their communities but did not actively participate in community affairs. Two thirds of the volunteers I interviewed reported not participating in any associations outside work or family and said they were not engaged in any community initiatives before war.

To understand the citizen (dis)engagement of my respondents and their individualistic interpretation of “good citizenship” before the war, one has to situate their experiences within the socio-economic context of Ukraine’s post-socialist transition. The volunteers’ stories provided here give complex accounts of the ways volunteers navigated the volatile environment of the country since independence and struggled for stability and control amidst uncertainty. These hardships alienated them from broader engagement and public participation, reducing the scope of concerns to family and friends. This section looks at the conceptualization of citizen duty prior to war and lays the ground for analyzing the subsequent reordering of citizen identities.

Caring for the family as a citizen duty

One example of a previously disengaged volunteer is Iryna, a 38-year-old resident of Odesa. Commenting on her public engagement prior to war, Iryna talked at length about her employment trajectory; she took on numerous odd jobs unrelated to her educational credentials to earn a living. She explained her complete disengagement from social and political life of the country by citing the difficulty of coping with the unstable economic environment and a changing structure of opportunities. She used the language of “economic survival” to capture her experiences and preoccupations at that time:

I graduated from a technical college in Odesa and then from a university. I never worked in the field of my education, not even for a day. In the 90s and the beginning of 2000s, all industries were stalled. The only thing people cared about was how to make enough money to feed the family and survive. Throughout my life, I worked in any area where I could find employment. I didn't have much of a choice. I always felt insecure about myself, because I was not a specialist in any of these areas. As life kept throwing new challenges and opportunities at me, I kept learning new trades and skills. At first, I was learning the business of perfumes. Then, I had to learn the basics of management, because I was appointed as a manager of our department. Later, I had to learn the ropes of procurement management, not retail management. I was continuously learning new skills because life was very unstable back then. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 22 July 2015)

Iryna had to change jobs repeatedly in the course of two decades, finding creative ways to make a living and advance her career, often in unforeseen ways. There was no overarching vision of career advancement. Rather, the model of work was contingent on the opportunities available at the moment. Training was done on the job, without educational background in the area. The diploma that Iryna received from a technical college and then university did not serve her professionally. This created a sense of insecurity about professional identity, as Iryna indicated, where she felt a lack of competence and proper training. She had to “try out different things” and always “learned on the go” to catch up with rapid change and opportunities.

While Iryna managed to navigate the instable environment with a degree of success, others withdrew from professional life to take care of their families instead. In recounting her professional trajectory, Elena, another volunteer from Odesa, noted numerous workplaces and subsequent withdrawal from the labour force. She first worked at a theatre, while also teaching choreography to children at an arts college. She then organized a small ballet show, performing as a dancer. She was “struggling to get by,” as she recalls, because the salary of an artist was barely enough to cover the cost of the commute to and from work, and “then there was rent and other living expenses to pay.” To survive, as Elena stated, she took two other jobs, but the workload wore her out “morally and physically.” Multiple jobs and permanent financial difficulties forced Elena to drastically change her professional trajectory – she signed up for casino training courses and got a job in a casino. She met her husband – a sailor by trade – at work, got married and “immediately got pregnant,” as she put it. She decided to quit work and become a housewife. She felt that this decision would benefit her family in multiple ways, including financially. Among other things, her resignation was dictated by low income and constant instability with employment.

Motherhood changed Elena’s professional trajectory again. She enrolled in a course on early childhood development, eventually turning it into a new occupation. She created a program, starting up a business revolving around the themes of pregnancy and motherhood. She later switched to photography as she found it difficult to be in charge of a center while taking care of her three children. Elena experimented with different occupations during her maternity leave and stated that she was able to do so because of her husband’s financial ability to provide for the family. The money she made through her projects and experiments were enough to cover only petty expenses, she remarked, with the rest being taken care of by her spouse. When I interviewed her Elena humorously described her present family arrangements as her husband “making money” and

herself staying at home “being pretty and doing work around the house.” Like Elena, a few other female respondents reported withdrawing from the workforce to take care of their families.

The life trajectories of my respondents highlight several important aspects of post-socialist reality in Ukraine and the ways it constrained broader engagement. The collapse of the Soviet Union caused the dismantling of various economic, professional and social structures. This included the dissolution of enterprises that employed many people; plants and factories closed down or reduced their operations with disruptions in the chain of production and economic transformations. Amidst acute economic crisis and social dislocation, many individuals adopted self-reliance strategies to insulate their families from economic shocks and ensure some stability. One of these strategies was to replace state assistance with parallel structures, for example, cultivating household autonomy to increase autonomy from the state and the market (Shevchenko 2002; Rose 1995; Round et al. 2008). People increasingly relied on a social economy in which goods and services were produced without money exchange (Rose 1995). These included a wide range of activities, such as growing food, repairing or building additions to a house or apartment, or exchanging help with friends or friends of friends without payment. Rose (1995) notes that the social economy was more common in Ukraine than in Central and Eastern Europe in the post-socialist period, with almost every household engaging in it to address the shortage of resources.

Increased reliance on private and family networks was another coping strategy amidst the economic instability.⁴⁶ In the context of shifting social institutions and constant fluctuations of professional and social identities, kinship and family-based networks acquired additional significance as they became the anchors of certainty and predictability (Shevchenko 2002). These

⁴⁶ During Soviet times, vibrant private networks developed to cope with the shortage economy (Howard 2002a). Private connections played an important role in acquiring goods and products rarely available in stores. Friendship networks were also important because of high politicization of the public space with people retracting to the private sphere of trusted friends to express themselves.

networks were seen as more permanent and reliable than other types of ties. The availability of these networks became the best predictor of poverty escape in post-socialist Ukraine (Wanner and Dudwick 2003). As Zhurzhenko (2004) notes, the increased significance of familial networks was coupled with the rise of neo-familialism, an ideology that placed the family at the center of the political, social and economic revival of independent Ukraine. This ideology positioned women as carers of familial life and men as breadwinners. In reality, many women left the workforce to care for family, seeing it as the morally right thing to do, or engaged in familial business in a way that allowed them to take care of the family while contributing to it financially.

Given the acute problems of post-socialist transition, some of my female respondents felt that focusing their time and energy exclusively on family needs makes them “good citizens.” Their understanding of “citizen duty” centered on being a responsible mother and a good wife, prioritizing children, domestic affairs and household management. As one of female volunteers remarked:

I used to think that taking care of my family is my duty vis-à-vis society. If my family is “a healthy unit” of society and everyone does what they are supposed to in relation to their families, the society will be better off. That was the philosophy of my life. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 8 July 2015).

Given the post-socialist reality, Iryna, Olena and others like them subscribed to a moral obligation that prioritized the well-being of their families and a close circle of friends. Their attempts to insulate their families from the cycle of poverty and create a sense of comfort at home morally absolved them from partaking in public and communal affairs and eroded their need for commitment to the collective good. Echoing this point, one of my respondents said did not feel morally obliged to contribute to the state or public affairs in any way: “I gave birth to my child without state’s support. I raised my son all by myself. What do I owe the state?”

Reflecting on their priorities before the war, some of my respondents noted that their preoccupation with family, comfort and economic security narrowed their thinking and alienated them from broader social and political issues. Two strikingly similar comments demonstrate this pattern:

I never tried to understand what's going on in politics (*ne vnikala*). I guess it was because, given my life challenges and constant disruptions to work, I was always thinking how to earn a living. I didn't have any social development and, as many others, I *only recently realized that we live in a society* (emphasis is added). That people shouldn't be concerned only with their personal circumstances, because, as a society, we can change the environment where we live. We never had... No one ever taught us this. You had to come to this realization by yourself. For me, this realization came through volunteer work. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 12 July 2015)

Before the war, everyone was taking care of their private life. Everyone was centered on their personal comfort and social circle. If I have 2,000 hryvnia – I can go to the cinema and watch a movie. If I don't have the money – I can't do that. I can visit my friends instead. Our lives shrunk to this very narrow circle of private interests! I could not escape this narrowly defined pace of life because it became a reflux – something you do without thinking. When I think back, the narrowness stuns me. I am not a stupid person and it shocks me to what extent I was disinterested in politics. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 8 July 2015)

As these statements indicate, economic hardships and political instability of the transition period, exacerbated by the history of previous disengagement, alienated my respondents from broader participation and made them focused on private well-being. This dispersal and retreat to the private sphere inhibited the functioning of the public sphere where individuals ought to get together to shape their social and political realities. Receding from the public and limiting relations to private ones is what destroys political communities, as Arendt (1958) aptly argues. In these instances, individuals are left impotent and their ability to wield power in the public realm is subverted.

Professional integrity as a citizen duty

While some volunteers saw their care for family as a “citizen duty,” others articulated their social obligations in relation to work, where holding oneself to high professional standards was seen as an act of good citizenship. Many saw their broader duties in properly doing their job; not taking bribes and restoring justice to the best of their abilities. Ivan from Dnipropetrovs’k, a doctor at a local hospital who engaged in volunteering, articulated his understanding of citizenship duty in the following manner:

Before the war, I formulated my civic duty very clearly – I have to do my work to the best of my abilities. I work as a doctor, so I have to hold myself to high standards in that area. I stuck to my principles during war times, when my profession acquired social significance. This country didn’t give me much. Whatever it gave me – I paid back a long time ago. Take my professional training, for example. My medical education was funded by the state for six years. I was required to work for a public hospital for three years after graduation to compensate for it. That’s the arrangement. I have been working as a doctor at a public hospital for 15 years now, having a beggarly wage. Despite everything, I keep doing my work to the best of my abilities, taking care of patients and ensuring their good health. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs’k, 10 August 2015)

Tatiana, a former police officer who had worked for the police for 20 years, shared somewhat similar sentiments, talking about her work for the police as a way in which she “did good for the society” and acted as a good citizen. Like many others, Tatiana limited her life outside work to family and friends. She was outside politics, not “getting involved.” As she explained, it was partly because the police were expected to be apolitical and disengaged:

At work, we always had this creeping message – you are outside of politics, you don’t decide anything, you can’t get involved. So, I limited my life to taking care of my family. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 8 June 2015)

Instead, Tatiana treated her work as a milieu where she could make up for her political and public disengagement:

One of the things that made me feel better about my life is that I worked for the Ministry of Internal Affairs and many of my friends sought my assistance when

they couldn't get a just treatment (*dobitsia pravdy*). They knew that I am a truth seeker, so they always asked for my advice on how to submit a complaint or a claim. I think that the professional assistance to people kept me distracted to a large extent...I really liked doing that. Imagine, someone comes to your office crying and shaking from stress and after talking to you for 2-3 hours, they walk out of your office smiling and grateful for the support. It made me so happy! I felt like my mission on earth was to do good. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 8 June 2015)

The frustration with “the state” is visible in both accounts. State failures to provide public services in an equitable way, ensure justice to its citizens and assure a decent living to public servants factored in prominently into my respondents' understanding of “citizen duty’.” Instead of seeking broader engagement, some of my respondents invested efforts into helping fellow Ukrainians access public services or ease their struggles with inefficient or corrupt bureaucracies.

In the environment where many public services became de facto privatized and many street-level bureaucrats engaged in the economy of informal payments and bribe-asking (Polese 2014; Morris and Polese 2014), “sticking to one’s principles” of not taking bribes or helping “ordinary people” to seek justice was construed by some of my respondents as a “civic act” – something that required them to stoically endure economic hardships and difficult work conditions for the benefit of their fellow citizens. Those public servants who did not resort to informal arrangements and continued to perform their professional duties out of ethical concerns considered themselves driven by civic considerations. Putting “public” back into public services and resisting to adopt morally dubious practices made my respondents feel proud of themselves and their work ethics. This understanding of professional integrity as constitutive of “good citizenship” absolved them from seeking broader engagement and participating more actively in the public sphere. It also eased the responsibility of individuals vis-à-vis the state that was seen as failing to provide basic services to its citizens and create decent working conditions for public servants.

Self-reliance and autonomy as responsible citizenship

Aside from those who retreated to family life or worked in the public sector, there were individuals who focused on career advancement and financial stability. Entrepreneurship became common in Ukraine, with entrepreneurs mostly relying on the household resources for managing business. The prevalence of entrepreneurial activities and the passivity of entrepreneurs in the public realm highlights yet another aspect of post-socialist life in Ukraine: the importance of self-reliance and autonomy and its significance for the construction of “good citizenship.”

The understanding of self-reliance as characteristic of good citizenship had to do with the nature of transformation from socialism to capitalism and the types of social and economic responses it generated. In late socialism, professional life hinged on stability and predictability, with people moving through an established cycle of schooling, education, work and retirement (Shevchenko 2009). In the post-socialist environment, many skills developed in late socialism turned into liabilities as the stable environment they were accustomed to was replaced with one requiring a completely different set of competences. The problem ran deeper than a lack of proper skills, however. Many individuals lacked *the very principle* of generating appropriate responses valued in the new environment, as Shevchenko points out (2009: 50). In part, this had to do with the fact that the framework of post-socialist transformation was not clear, leaving individuals confused and disoriented. As a result, many came to conceptualize social conditions in terms of a “permanent crisis” where life was no longer predictable, chaos was always pending, and the need to plan for the worst was always relevant (ibid).

Navigating the fast-changing environment and the informal economy that grew exponentially in the wake of socialism with a certain degree of success required entrepreneurial skills and modes of thinking (Shevchenko 2002). Those who managed to master these could represent themselves as mature agents, capable of deciphering complex warning signs and acting

to prevent failures. Given the few channels individuals had to demonstrate their professional and civic proficiency, entrepreneurial thinking and self-reliance became an important venue for identity formation in the post-socialist reality (ibid). In the subsequent individualistic interpretations of “good citizenship,” the successful navigation of shifting social and economic landscapes was evidence of a “good” and “capable” citizen.

Their relationship with the political community and the state was often framed through the language of self-sufficiency and autonomy. “Just don’t stifle our ability to work and we will be okay,” one of my respondents recounted her philosophy at the time. This detached mode of relatability to the state and others inhibited broader participation, disengaging individuals from political and social life. As the state has become a symbol of chaos and disintegration, unable to guarantee social or economic security, my respondents did not experience any moral obligation towards it. Preoccupation with private concerns and self-reliance were central to their lives and they constructed an understanding of social duties in relation to it.

The accounts of my respondents point to the transformative power of wartime engagement. War volunteering has remade obligations of individuals to the collective, the nation and the state. As the war presented them with immense challenges and vulnerabilities that could be addressed only collectively, my respondents questioned the value of self-reliance and autonomy. Addressing war needs exposed my respondents to intensive cooperation and interaction with others, making them change their attitudes to fellow citizens, connect to like-minded individuals and understand the value of the collectivity. A deepened sense of belonging, gendered and nationalized, replaced previous isolationist and individualistic mode of being. The next section takes a closer look at the changes occurring in the midst of war engagement, focusing on the sense

of individual and collective empowerment and the acquisition of competences useful for broader participation.

The reordering of citizen identities amidst war

Overcoming a sense of powerlessness: collective and individual agency

Given the complexity of tasks undertaken by volunteers and adversarial background conditions, many volunteers felt a sense of pride in the success of their collective efforts. The fact that many people joined together to fundraise, coordinate and deliver supplies to the front when state officials were not able to do so became a source of optimism; it showed the resourcefulness, creativity and capacity of “ordinary people” to solve problems in an effective manner. Many felt that they had taken part in something “unique” and “extraordinary” – the feeling encouraged them to continue their efforts despite hardships. One of my respondents noted:

The uniqueness of volunteering, apart from the fact that our hearts are in it, lies in that in a short period of time volunteers managed to organize an alternative supply and logistics chain for the army, one parallel to the Ministry of Defense. There were cases when the Ministry of Defense was trying to control volunteers, make various arrangements to regulate volunteering. They were unable to do anything, because every time the Ministry of Defense found itself in a difficult position of not being able to supply provision on the contact line and sustain the military operations, volunteers stepped in and filled in for them, delivering all the necessary supplies. This is the uniqueness of volunteering in Ukraine, that we managed to create an alternative system to sustain the functioning of the army, defend the territory and do other tasks. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 23 July 2015)

As this suggests, some volunteers took pride in their newly discovered latent abilities and in the fortitude of “ordinary people” to handle difficult situations, especially in the cases when the state with its infrastructure and resources failed to do so. Volunteers frequently indicated that they managed complex tasks “better than they thought they could” or that they could “achieve a lot more” working together. The success stories often emphasized the unlikely nature of success and the uniqueness of achievement.

Volunteers recounted stories of successful coping that were indicative of collective capacity and empowerment. Positive experiences completing tasks, influencing public officials and developing new initiatives addressed previous disillusionment with collective action. Some of the volunteers I interviewed commented extensively on their conviction that acting together was key in addressing state weakness, corruption and taking care of war-affected populations. This signals that the locus of control shifted, with individuals feeling more empowered as a collectivity in the face of challenges and difficulties.

Many of my respondents emphasized the importance of unity and trust in working towards change in the country. Some noted their realization that individuals acting in isolation had little leverage. Acting together was a source of empowerment. One volunteer said in this regard:

Everyone should be given a chance to contribute, even if they have little or no money. Poor pensioners need an outlet to share their distress, even if they have no money to give. We need to accept any help and any involvement. It unites us and makes us stronger. Individually, we are powerless. United, we are empowered. (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 10 June 2015).

These statements are indicative of the changed locus of control with volunteers seen themselves as agents capable of changing their surrounding when they act collectively. Many volunteers had established a connection between collective action and political and social outcomes based on their recent experiences of war and the Maidan protests. Some of my respondents articulated a newly discovered sense of empowerment in terms of the ability to have leverage over developments in the country. They noted that many things depend on the people. “Of course, if you are of an opinion that you can’t change anything – it’s true. It’s a self-fulfilling prophesy, really. But those who act - see that their actions matter,” remarked one of them. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs’k, 10 August 2015)

For others, witnessing the dedication and commitment of many individuals firsthand was helpful for overcoming the mistrust of collective initiatives and impression that all voluntary activities are “forced,” addressing the negative legacy of the Soviet Union of “involuntary volunteering.” Having noticed the value of volunteer work and its genuine aspirations of people to help made some of my respondents more willing to engage in a variety of initiatives. Their ability to get other people involved rose as well. A volunteer from Kharkiv expressed this change in the following manner:

Somehow, everyone around is helping. Before, it would be weird if I approached someone asking to organize an event. I would get a lot of questions – what for and how much would they be paid... Now it’s much easier and no one questions your intent to do good. Everyone understands that the people have woken up. (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 8 June 2015)

Many volunteers used metaphors of “awakening,” “opening eyes,” or “switching in” to indicate the rapid change in the ways they perceived the world and their role in it. They reported being more socially connected and cognizant of the situation in the country. This is indicative of an increased sense of individual agency with volunteers adopting a more active mode of participation in community and public affairs.

Building community and creating a more positive attitude towards others

Volunteers recounted stories of support and kindness they witnessed throughout Maidan and war volunteering to illustrate the kind of people they encountered in these difficult times. These included small gestures of humanity, like someone bringing hot beverages to those freezing in the cold on local Maidan, to collecting sugar for months to donate to the army, to donating money saved for medical procedures (chemo-therapy) for the needs of soldiers. Sometimes, seemingly small gestures masked a larger sacrifice. A female pensioner from Odesa described an

incident when she donated the money she had been saving for a new pair of glasses to a soldier injured at the front:

I saw it on the news that a young boy got injured after two months of service at the front. He was an orphan, raised by his grandmother... her pension was minuscule, 1100 hryvnias, and she came to Kyiv to take care of him. The doctor said that he would be able to walk again if he gets an artificial limb which costs 100,000 hryvnias. Where is he supposed to get the money? It was so painful to watch. It made me cry... You know, my pension is quite small – 1270 hryvnias (\$65CAD at the current exchange rate) and I saved up 1500 hryvnias for a new pair of glasses. The ones I have had screws falling out... After seeing the story, I donated the money I had saved – he needs it more. He needs an artificial leg and an arm. So, I donated. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 14 July 2015)

Stories of sacrifice to help strangers in a precarious situation circulated among the volunteers, with emphasis on the selflessness of assistance, the readiness to “give away everything,” and the total dedication to the needs of war-affected populations. “You know, in my life I have never seen anything like that – for people to show that kind of commitment and determination. I don’t know how it was during the previous war, but this time it’s really something out of ordinary,” remarked one of my respondents. As previous demonstrated, affective engagement was primarily directed towards combatants and feelings towards them were validated due to their sacrifices for the people and the state. Others focused on the precarity of the internally displaced with affect being produced through discourses of vulnerability and common humanity.

In fact, the emphasis on small gestures of humanity coming from those in precarious situations themselves served to strengthen a sense of the collective and reinforce solidarities among people. The story of 86-year-old volunteer baba Liuda who brought apples for the soldiers at Dnipropetrovsk train station, sold flowers from her garden to fundraise for them and came regularly to volunteer at the hospital exemplifies the significance of financially marginal contributions to the overall success of volunteering and strengthening alliances in wartime. Baba Liuda was featured in the local media outlets and YouTube videos with many commenting on her

dedication, patriotism and generosity of heart. I contend her modest means and physical fragility were crucial resources for the construction of volunteering as a collective enterprise that rests on the efforts of “all caring people” to act together. Stories like hers allowed to make emphasis on inclusiveness, collectivity and hardship-forged connectedness. These stories posited volunteering as a social space where affective labour and humanity supersedes the significance of financial assistance; the space where personal interests give way to communal ways of thinking and acting. By focusing on Baba Liuda and similar cases, volunteers engaged in representation work, highlighting the participatory spirit of volunteering as well as its affective nature to help others in need.

The new sense of concern for the welfare of others was reflected in the names of volunteer networks. “Caring People” (*Nebaiduzhy narod*), for example, was the name of one volunteer network in Odesa. “Feed the Soldier” (*Nagodui Soldata*) was another volunteer network organized in Kharkiv. The naming stressed the embrace of “the other” and concern for their well-being. Reciprocal support and discourses on the selfless nature of volunteering more generally acted to overcome the feeling of social isolation and create positive patterns of collective problem-solving. Individual disagreements and fragmentation among volunteers existed, of course, but were often subsumed in the generally positive perception of volunteering.

Another noteworthy change pertains to profoundly altered forms of sociality in volunteer communities. War-spurred mobility and cooperation substantively reshuffled the social fabric of Ukraine, bringing together people of diverse backgrounds, but similar values. There was a sense among volunteers that they were surrounded “by like-minded people who think and act the same way” and “other people who care about the same issues.” The newly acquired sense of connectedness was reinforced by the profoundly traumatic nature of volunteering. Some

respondents claimed that they formed ties with each other through “the trials and ordeals” they shared and these ties were “stronger than family bonds.” War experiences forged new solidarities and types of loyalty, sharpening the boundaries of belonging to the nation and strengthened a sense of “common destiny.” As a result, many volunteers felt that the war made them more dependent on each other and invested in each others’ lives.

Some felt the war provided an opportunity for people to reveal their potential and good nature, qualities hidden or unacknowledged before the war. A volunteer from Dnipropetrovs’k mentioned:

We had lots of decent people before the war, but we didn’t know that! Some people were doing charity work, but they never made in public. Take me, for example. I was helping an orphanage, but no one knew about it. I never told anyone. This is not something you do for publicity or bragging. And I didn’t know that some of my friends were doing the same. War brought all these good deeds to the surface, made them visible. And now, I understand what kind of people surround me. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs’k, 15 August 2015)

A newly acquired feeling of belonging to a community and pride made volunteers reconsider some of their previous patterns of behavior. For example, one of my respondents noted that before the war it was easier for her to donate money and “be done with it” instead of doing something more meaningful, like attending a funeral. She reconsidered her behavior because of war engagement:

Many people give money without trying to get to the bottom of things. They don’t feel a sense of belonging when it comes to war and all that. If they saw what I have seen, they would feel differently. But they don’t want to see it. You can’t force them because volunteering comes out of good will. No one could force me to do what I am doing right now. This is my conscious decision to volunteer. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 12 July 2015)

The cooperative nature of volunteering helped individuals make sense of the difficulties and war-induced shock. The social support system that developed in volunteering networks helped them deal with distress, establish a sense of control and build resilience in the face of hardships. It

provided a space to cope with war-spurred anxieties. For many individuals, fellow volunteers became “a new family,” at times substituting for the real family who may have disagreed about the war and disapproved of active engagement.

Volunteer work allowed some of my respondents to connect better with and value those around them, regain a sense of control in the volatile political environment and appreciate things previously taken for granted. As a result, some interpreted the war as “an opportunity” to change the course of developments in Ukraine. Comments like “all these events and trials are given for a reason” or “we needed this war to realize that we are decent people and we deserve to live better” show how volunteers injected meaning into the war and rebuilt a sense of community. As one remarked: “This is a difficult path, filled with blood. This is our fate and there is nothing we can do about it. We have to look at it philosophically, without panic. We have to work, do something to improve the situation.”

On a large scale, as the testimonies of volunteers demonstrate, the war was “a shock to the system,” to the habitual ways of life. Some volunteers reported altered priorities; these changes included the re-evaluation of their own role in society and the overcoming of social isolation, two legacies of Communism that suppressed public participation in the period following the collapse of the Soviet Union. These findings are in line with the scholarship on trauma mediation and growth amidst suffering. A study by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) on personal growth amidst suffering and trauma shows that people often learn coping strategies from each other and change their life philosophy allowing them to connect better to other people and to emphasize and embrace the needs of others. As a result, many experience personal growth in the face of hardships and find meaning in their suffering and sacrifice. The accounts of my respondents point in the similar

direction with volunteers reporting personal growth, more meaningful life priorities and higher appreciation of others that grew out of their war engagement.

The acquisition of civic skills and new competences

Along with providing space for connecting with others and acquiring a sense of agency, volunteering presented an organizational setting for many individuals to develop new skills necessary for broader engagement.⁴⁷ The diverse range of skills reported by my interviewees reflected the wide range of needs generated by war. This section discusses volunteers' increased capacity for participation by focusing on their self-reported improvement when it comes to community engagement. It emphasizes the skill-creating aspects of volunteering, while also pointing to the stratification in skill acquisition based on class, age and gender.

Since volunteering primarily relied on the ability to organize large-scale fundraising campaigns and report back to ordinary citizens on the use of donated resources, communication skills were key for successful and sustained engagement. My respondents reported learning how to communicate with local media outlets, journalists, write public posts and press releases. Exploring new opportunities and increasing the visibility of war efforts required them to establish diverse types of communication channels across the cities and constantly engage in information exchange with those affected by war and helping them.

Given the scope of the needs and assistance, many lead volunteers said they substantially improved their organizational skills, notably their ability to coordinate projects and address complex tasks. In interviews, they often referred to their acquired proficiency at organizing

⁴⁷ Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) term the skills useful for broader participation "civic skills" and note that it is possible to measure them somewhat objectively as they include communication skills, organizational skills acquired through employment or volunteer work, political awareness. They note that relatively objective competences translate in individuals' subjective feelings of competence and efficiency. In my analysis, I primarily rely on my respondents' accounts in their perception of own efficiency and confidence.

and supervising various processes, including lodging, settlement assistance for IDPs and supporting them during the first stage of displacement. This type of work included writing grant applications, forming a team of people in charge of seeking donors, locating sources of financial assistance and cooperating with international and national organizations. Iryna, a volunteer from Dnipropetrovs'k, exemplifies the change in the way some volunteers dealt with requests for help over the course of their volunteering:

Well, before when we got a request to settle 40 people, I would panic. Mostly, because I didn't know how to deal with that many people. Right now, it's not an issue for me anymore. Now, I understand how to solve it. I have developed a toolkit of workable solutions: if I can't do it this way, I'll try to approach and get it done in a different way. Eventually, I manage to do it. I know the algorithm. I have acquired experience in administrative work, social work, medical supervision. They call me "the problem solver" sometimes (*reshalovo*). I think this nickname suits me well, because I know how to solve issues, where to call, how to find stuff, whom to talk to. I know how to talk to people in a way that would yield results and I can logically think through the problem to find a solution. These skills are transferable to any sphere, I think. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs'k, 12 August 2015)

Some volunteers noted that even though they had experience of organization, volunteering presented challenges of great scope and responsibility. It required them to think differently and develop more efficient approaches. The learning curve was steep, as they had to learn how to participate in procurement auctions, how to organize the logistics of assistance provisions and deal with numerous other demands under financial and physical constraints.

A few of my respondents noted that assisting soldiers or IDPs with legal matters and claims familiarized them with state regulations and procedures. Those working to ensure that legal rights of the soldiers and IDPs were upheld by the state or regional authorities reported a good knowledge of state regulations in these areas. Others reported a better understanding of corruption schemes within state agencies and the ways to ensure accountability and transparency of state transactions. A group of volunteers from Odesa, for instance, controlled the customs clearance and

distribution of Canadian humanitarian assistance to Ukrainian troops in the summer of 2014. They were engaged in every step of the process, starting from the arrival of the assistance, to sorting uniforms and other supplies and delivering them to soldiers. Natalia, a lead volunteer involved in the process, noted that this experience, along with other similar ones, helped her learn state regulations and spaces of corruption:

I got a clear understanding of how procurement control works and I can transfer this knowledge to any area. Counting military shoes or dressers in the childcare is identical. Basically, it comes down to the same thing – the money that has been allocated and the expenses. In very basic terms, our government or regional administration deal with basic accounting – the revenues and the expenditures in any area of policy making. This can be applied to social policy as well. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 25 July 2015)

Volunteer engagement often led to a substantially increased interaction with public institutions and public officials. When volunteers were confronted with large-scale tasks in unfamiliar areas, they reached out for help. For example, Iryna, who was supplying water to the front, said that after estimating the scope of what was needed, she started studying the ways to do it efficiently and professionally. She contacted military personnel who served in Africa, Syria, or Iraq to find out how the water delivery system was organized there:

As I learned more about the issue, I realized that filling up the holes is not effective. The army had to do something about it. I contacted the commanders of our army with the questions I had. It really helped me to get to know more about the army. It was also the first time when I got to meet decent people in the Ukrainian Army, working hard to improve things. I got acquainted with many officers, commanders of regiments that served abroad and know how the army is supposed to function. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs'k, 14 August 2015)

As Iryna's and similar cases illustrate, volunteers worked to increase the efficiency and responsiveness of state agencies to deal with war needs. In the process, they became much more aware of the state's responsibilities, the state's capabilities and the conditions of assistance

provision. They developed a sense of “ownership” when it comes to public institutions and strengthened their identification with the administrative state.

Other volunteers noted the acquisition of professional knowledge in areas related to war-affected populations. Alena, a legal consultant from Kharkiv, previously worked in land and mortgage law. When internally displaced persons started arriving in Kharkiv, there was no legal consultant to provide assistance. Alena assumed responsibility out of professional curiosity, as it was a new area for her. Requests for assistance were diverse, ranging from questions on social assistance and retirement payments, to legal documents like birth certificates. Reflecting on the skills gained through volunteering, she remarked:

I would like to go back to peaceful affairs... but at the same time, I have acquired experience in human rights protection. I have lots of information about the sites of unfeedom, detention vaults, hostage taking, illegal imprisonment in the war zone, how to reach out to people in precarious situations and how to defend their rights after release, making sure they receive compensation. I received some of the skills at seminars and conferences. I also learnt a lot from IDPs directly. I can't just move back to what I was doing before... I can't waste the knowledge I received, especially in the areas that deal with human life. It wouldn't be ethical. (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 14 June 2015)

Taking legislative initiatives, attending conferences and workshops, negotiating with MPs and ministerial representatives were some of the tasks that Alena took on. Her new professional specialization recast Alena's ethical commitment to others, making her more inclined to stay engaged in public affairs and help those in need.

Similarly, a few other volunteers noted that war experience made them rethink their professional path. For instance, Eva Gukalova, a lead volunteer from Station Kharkiv, indicated her interest in continuing to assist socially marginalized people:

I have been thinking a lot about it lately. I was always interested in social work not in a sense of making donations, but in a sense of enabling those in precarious circumstances to take control over their life and become autonomous. We have lots of interesting ideas now that could be implemented. I think once the war is

over, I would pursue a professional path in that area. I understand that we will face a tough reality with lots of socially dependent people, disabled, orphans and so on. (Fieldwork, Kharkiv, 14 June 2015)

If materialized, this is a significant reorientation in Eva's professional trajectory as she had not been engaged in this type of work before the war and had no managerial experience. Volunteering presented an immense learning opportunity for her and others, altering their ethical and professional aspirations in ways empathetic of others.

My interviews indicated that, overall, the acquisition of new skills went in tandem with an increased sense of confidence. A few volunteers reported that while the skills were important, the primary benefit was the realization of their potential and their ability to learn and cope with challenging tasks. It appears that volunteering enabled them to value and appreciate their strength and resilience, encouraging them to undertake new tasks and initiate new projects. At the same time, many talked about the emotional and psychological costs of volunteering. The intensity and traumatic nature of volunteer work made some unwilling to think of future engagement. Constantly dealing with stress and precarity exhausted my respondents emotionally and physically with many wishing they could go back to their "normal lives."

It is important to note that the acquisition of skills has not been equally distributed across and within volunteer networks. Some volunteers felt that the actual skills they acquired were limited to war needs and were hardly transferable outside the war reality. Others referenced a lack of experience and knowledge of how to interact with public institutions, how to write a formal inquiry as reasons for hesitation to seek similar engagement outside volunteering. By the same token, the female volunteers knitting camouflage nets or cooking for the army did not have equal access to competence-building types of engagement. They had less exposure and access to media outlets, mostly relying on the lead volunteers to fundraise and communicate with the public. Their preoccupations were limited to labour intensive tasks, not to the organizational aspects of

volunteering. The changes at this level of volunteering were attitudinal ones, with individuals developing a more positive perception of collective action and fellow volunteers.

In this sense, Djupe and Gilbert (2006) observe that in cases when the social composition of an institution is more homogenous, skills are distributed more equally and efficaciously across members of an organization. In more socially diverse settings access to the acquisition of civic skills is stratified; those more equipped to play leadership roles in organizational settings due to their education, profession, or economic power have more access to the development of civic skills. The study notes how social heterogeneity structures, but does not define, the redistribution of competences and skills. In the volunteer networks, pensioners, unemployed individuals, professionals, entrepreneurs and others came together to provide assistance; here as elsewhere, those with more skills had more access to the acquisition of civic skills. War presented an immense learning opportunity for lead volunteers particularly to improve their organizational and leadership skills and familiarize themselves with state regulations and public institutions.

Emerging model of citizenship in volunteer community

Political participation of volunteers

How does the acquisition of new capabilities and skills translate into political participation? Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) note that the ability to communicate effectively and organize various initiatives is critical for most forms of political action. Political action, according to them, refers to a broad range of activities that have “an intent of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies” (1995: 38). This section looks at how changes in collective and individual agency relate to political participation of war

volunteers. It shows that while volunteers have engaged in a variety of activities to influence the intent of policies and contest the decisions of authorities, some forms of political participation remain stifled. Particularly, volunteers remain predominantly reluctant to engage in politics personally and treat those willing to do so with a degree of suspicion.

During my fieldwork, the volunteers whose work I was observing engaged in numerous activities that can be classified as political participation. Organizing and attending protests to contest authorities' decisions, attending parliamentary hearings and working to improve the legislation regarding war veterans and IDPs are some examples of the ways my respondents attempted to influence policies, vocalize their concerns and seek redress to the grievances they encountered. Some visited local meetings with public servants or contacted city officials in relation to their volunteer work. Most of these activities were undertaken on behalf of war-affected individuals and combatants. Women have been particularly active in the sphere of social policy, which they came to see as their area of responsibility.

The timing of my fieldwork allowed for another measurement of political activity among volunteers. The data collection took place a few months before the fall 2015 municipal elections in Ukraine. This gave me an opportunity to discuss the idea of running in the municipal elections with my respondents and capture their attitudes at the time. I noted that the upcoming elections generated vigorous debates among volunteers as to whether or not and on what terms they should go into politics. Whereas many discussed this possibility, there was widespread hesitation or outright reluctance to engage. I draw on the interviews with my respondents to outline the reasons for this political apathy and discuss implications it has for the models of citizenship emergent in volunteer communities.

My estimates suggest that about 11 volunteers (approximately 10% of my respondents) decided to run for office in the municipal elections of 2015. Of those, only three felt that engaging in politics at any level was the only right thing to do and a “natural” way for volunteer engagement to evolve. They said politics was the only way to change the “system” and help those in need systemically. “It’s wrong to collect, scrape money from pensioners, while the state budget remains to be in the hands of corrupt officials,” remarked one. “Ideally, all of us - and first of all ATO soldiers as they proved their readiness to sacrifice their life for the sake of the country – should represent communities at local, regional and national levels. These people have made it clear that they are not in it for personal gains. They want systemic change,” noted another. This respondent positioned volunteers as trustworthy and capable to participate in politics. Further, he noted that volunteers were “the only hope for Ukraine to overcome corruption and corrupt elites.” In narratives like this one, war veterans were often represented as the ones most capable, least corruptible and most deserving to occupy positions of power and represent others.

Other volunteers who decided to run in elections felt more conflicted about politics and talked with great hesitation about their participation. They saw politics as “the game of the powerful” where they had little chance to succeed. At the same time, they felt it was “the only way to have more leverage” over the developments in their region, such as budget allocation, anti-corruption initiatives, etc. In interviews, these volunteers indicated their intention to run in the elections while noting their low expectations of the outcomes. Some felt that “the system” with its corruption and paternalism didn’t allow for fair and transparent competition. Nonetheless, they thought that their withdrawal would further perpetuate injustice. Such feelings made it difficult to decide whether to engage politically.

In conversation with me Ivan, a demobilized soldier from Dnipropetrovs'k who had been helping the army and simultaneously working in an advisory capacity for the regional administration, made several conflicting statements regarding his political aspirations:

I am absolutely apolitical. I think that politics is the game of the powerful, the game for the sake of personal interests. If you don't belong to the circle of the powerful [...], then there is no sense for you to play on someone else's terms. Personally, I have no interest in it. At the same time, I understand that an ordinary activist like myself or anyone else for that matter have no resources to seize on the opportunities available in the country. (Fieldwork, Dnipropetrovs'k, 8 August 2015).

Most of the volunteers who decided to run for election faced dilemmas similar to Ivan's. Some were concerned about the inability to compete with incumbent candidates or those with considerable financial resources: "To run an election campaign, you need to reach out to people, advertise your candidacy, raise awareness about your program, hire people to help with organizational matters, print leaflets and so on. It all requires resources that I don't have. I can't even afford going to a hair salon to look presentable. I have no chance," remarked one of my respondents. These volunteers were hesitant about joining existing parties and skeptical about their records. Siding with a party, some felt, would undermine the social credibility and trust gained by volunteering. "You won't come clean even if you join the most patriotic party. Parties have hidden agendas and you become guilty by association," shared one of my respondents. "I have no money, no property. I just earn a small salary and volunteer outside of work. All I have is my reputation, my independence. I am not ready to give that away for politics," mentioned another one.

The issue of trust surfaced consistently in my conversations with volunteers. Some were especially concerned about it, considering the way it had been earned. Iryna, a volunteer from Dnipropetrovs'k committed to helping families find missing soldiers, said that for her it was unacceptable "to turn the trust earned through grief and suffering into political capital." Others

noted that trust was difficult to earn, but very easy to lose: “Joining existing political parties would ruin the legitimacy and recognition I built through volunteer work.” In other words, the social legitimacy and moral authority of volunteers was constructed in such a way that their political participation was inhibited. Those volunteers who thought differently often got negative reactions from other volunteers.

Those who did decide to partake in the elections often encountered resentment and sharp criticism. Dalia, the main volunteer of the Odesa kitchen battalion, felt under attack after she announced her willingness to go into politics. She talked with frustration about the condemnation and scorn of other volunteers:

I was subjected to a lot of moral pressure for my decision to run in the municipal elections. I felt like everyone ganged up against me. There was an immensely negative reaction from other volunteer – “she scrambles for power,” “she wants money and power.” “It’s all clear now. She got engaged in volunteering only to push her way through to the parliament or the city council. She is a traitor.” I lost a lot of friends and colleagues because of this. Volunteers were writing horrible things about me on Facebook – that “I took advantage of soldiers,” that “I am a selfish dog.” It was a terrible period. For over a month I couldn’t sleep and went through a depression. I just couldn’t understand that reaction. I am ready to take personal responsibility and do the hard work of changing the system. I have ideas how to do that. I have a law degree. Remaining a volunteer, I can’t change anything. I just couldn’t understand why other volunteers bullied me. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 23 July 2015)

While Dalia did have some supporters appreciative of her leadership and commitment, this testimony indicates that many felt disdainful of her decision to go into politics. Volunteering, they felt, was something to do for “the heart,” not for “the ranks.” Volunteers like Dalia were seen as ethically compromised and dishonest, seeking to benefit from their engagement:

Volunteering is supposed to be selfless. It is wrong to derive dividends from it, either in a form of money or power. Those volunteers who parade their efforts in public... it’s... well, I keep my volunteering to myself, I don’t make a display out of it. (Fieldwork, Odesa, 14 July 2015)

Another volunteer indicated that “volunteering is something you do for yourself, because you can’t *not* do it.” Later in the conversation, she added, “I look at the people who are getting into politics and I see that volunteering for them was just a way to get there. They pursue their own interests.” Many volunteers I interviewed disapproved of volunteers going into politics and felt it was inappropriate.

Where does this criticism for political engagement come from? My fieldwork interviews seem to suggest that the extremely negative attitudes about politicians and politics in Ukraine could be the reasons for condemnation.⁴⁸ Some volunteers talked about never seeing a decent politician, or said an honest politician is an oxymoron – it’s a nonsense. A few said those volunteers who went into politics used their volunteer work as a PR campaign. This narrative was amplified by the perception of “the unjust and impenetrable system” that did not allow fair competition and representation. Given this perception, volunteers willing to engage in politics were seen as cooperating with “the system” and seeking “personal dividends” out of it. Narratives about the impenetrable system and dirty politics acted to discourage participation from the start and scorn those who thought differently. Those willing to go into politics had to grapple with low trust towards politicians and the loss of social recognition from fellow volunteers.

Volunteering and politics, some added, presupposed a different type of relationship with the community. Volunteer work was posited as identifying a specific problem and working to address it. “You are responsible for what you say and promise. You can’t take it back. You can’t retract your promise. If someone asks me for something, like medication and I say that I can help, it weighs on my conscience to the moment when I find a way to fulfill my promise”, indicated my respondent. The emphasis on personal responsibility allowed freedom and autonomy for

⁴⁸ A survey conducted by KIIS indicated that the Parliament is trusted (fully or partially) only by 5.3 percent of Ukrainians, while volunteers enjoy the trust of 53.5 percent of Ukrainians (Kiev International 2017).

volunteers to choose those initiatives and tasks with which they felt comfortable. Political responsibility, they said, would take that freedom away, making them obliged to and dependent on others. Politics in the eyes of some presupposed a different relationship with the community, where the person in politics became “an object of criticism” for unfulfilled expectations instead of enjoying social approval for “doing something out of big heart.” Some noted that it also requires a different set of skills that they felt they do not possess.

One can conclude that a sense of individual and community empowerment went hand in hand with a feeling of political apathy. Pervasive distrust towards politicians made most of my respondents reluctant to engage. Even those who did run at the municipal elections stressed their disinterest in politics and vocalized their low expectations of it. As the Chapter on Gender Identities indicates, the high presence of women in volunteer networks might have added to the reluctance to engage politically as some of them framed political participation as “men’s business” whereas women’s duties have been restrained to the function of support and care.

Community-oriented citizenship in volunteer communities

My respondents did express the willingness to remain engaged, but in ways that did not include political participation. Similar to Oksana and her friend, quoted in the beginning of this chapter, many talked about an intention to remain active in community affairs, but emphasized their desire to stay “apolitical” otherwise. They came to see “stitching an icon” for the combatants or fundraising by the supermarkets as more efficient and ethically sound ways to contribute to community. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) call this type of engagement “participatory citizenship” meaning that individuals take an active part in community affairs, organize efforts to care for those in need and know strategies for accomplishing collective tasks. The focus of participatory citizen is on taking leadership positions within the established system to solve social

problems and improve social welfare. Westheimer and Kahne compare it to “justice-oriented citizenship” that places emphasis on the critical assessment of social, political and economic structures, seeks to change established systems and address the root causes of injustice. Whereas justice-oriented claims were articulated by some, most volunteers found more satisfying and appropriate to deal with specific requests for assistance, support families traumatized by war and engage in social work of various kinds.

The intensity of wartime engagement contributed to the reluctance of some to search for systemic solutions or consider political participation. The immense pressure of war on volunteers’ lives made many eager to “get back to normal life” and retain community engagement to a degree that would not interfere with family and professional responsibilities. Many conversations with volunteers about their plans for future engagement evoked the issue of emotional exhaustion and difficulty of continuous trauma mediation. Volunteering in the first year of war was overwhelming, psychologically difficult and required long hours of dedicated work. This had an effect on the emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing of those most intensively engaged in it.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on civilian volunteers helping in the war effort, exploring their trajectories of engagement before and during the war. I have shown that the acute challenges of post-socialist transition kept many of my respondents preoccupied with personal and familial well-being. In attempts to insulate their families from material deprivation, some developed an understanding of morality that prioritized a narrow range of private concerns and self-reliance, defining “good citizenship” in relation to family, professional ethics and entrepreneurial ability to earn a living in an economically and politically volatile environment. These understandings of citizen duty were individualistic and precluded my respondents from broader engagement. The

failures of the state to provide for its citizens and regulate state-society relations morally absolved my respondents from any obligations vis-à-vis the state.

I have demonstrated that the war challenged the value of self-reliance and focus on private life, presenting concerns that could only be addressed collectively. As individuals organized to carry out war-generated tasks, they established contacts with other volunteers, soldiers and individuals willing to donate money, time and resources. The profoundly social nature of volunteering presented space for volunteers to observe the commitment of others, which helped them improve attitudes towards the people around them. Simply stated, volunteer work allowed many to appreciate the effectiveness of collective action and establish bonds with community. By and large, it impelled my respondents to articulate a distinction between “the country” understood as people and community that are in crisis and “government” (*vlast*) understood as politicians and corrupted top-ranking bureaucrats. This distinction permitted them to continue engagement in the environment of political disillusionment and corruption, focusing attention on the pressing needs and individuals in precarity. Some sought engagement in public institutions to reform the state and have more leverage on the distribution of resources and decision making at the local and provincial levels.

Through volunteer engagement, my respondents came to see themselves as active and resilient community members, proud of their achievements amidst adversities and willing to stay engaged. Volunteering also provided numerous opportunities for my respondents to develop new capabilities, improve their organisational skills and build knowledge in areas related to war. As a result, a number reported an increased sense of individual agency, changed professional aspirations and altered life priorities. These changes lead to an acquired interest in broader engagement, mostly in the spheres of social work or public service.

Political engagement remained problematic, however, as the selfless nature of volunteering was set against the selfishness of politics. The “doable” and “tangible” nature of volunteer work where help was “concrete” and “deliverable results” was opposed to the ambiguity and ineffectiveness of political engagement. By and large, these discourses created boundaries around volunteering and hampered political engagement. Even though political engagement obviously presents an important venue for broader institutional and political change in Ukraine, the discursive and structural constraints around volunteer work and politics might limit the potential of the volunteer movement to act outside the war preoccupations.

Conclusion. Revisiting theoretical reflections about collective action and identity formation in wartime

This dissertation has examined the process of civilian mobilization amidst the Donbas war and queried its effects on identities of war volunteers: specifically on gender, national, language and citizen sub-categories of identification. It started by exploring the practical preoccupations of volunteers under the conditions of war and limited statehood. It showed that ordinary residents of frontline regions initially got together to provide for the military and take care of displaced individuals, the categories of citizens seen as most destitute and in need of support. Over time, volunteers' engagement shifted to ensuring the substantive citizenship of those in precarity, with energy directed at the practical enactment of the legal rights of combatants and displaced persons. In so doing, volunteers acted on their belief that these groups required assistance and merited support. The outcome was the partial structuring of welfare provision from below and the de-individualization of the costs of war for combatants and the internally displaced. Through care and assistance, volunteers positioned combatants and those internally displaced as valued members of a larger community and nation.

My fieldwork findings suggest that while larger cleavages played a role in shaping the dynamics of civilian mobilization in Ukraine, many volunteers were propelled to action by local concerns and affective responses to people in precarity. My interviews with civilian volunteers showed that many became engaged because of their uncertainty about the future; they wanted to prevent the spillover of violence to their home towns and contain the war on Donbas. To accomplish this, they helped combatants on the frontlines. Their initial engagement led to an increased awareness of the poor conditions of military service and to affective solidarities with the combatants, strengthening commitment to assist. A second group of volunteers reacted to the

vulnerability of internally displaced persons and worked to provide immediate and long-term support. A third group had participated in the Maidan protests, and their subsequent engagement evolved from that experience; their war efforts largely drew on the same preoccupation as that of the earlier protesters—a better future for Ukraine.

Collective action at the rear drew on diverse networks that reoriented their preoccupations towards war needs. The structures that emerged in the Maidan protests played a crucial role in the war mobilization, generating leadership skills, innovative initiatives and engaging people in the subsequent wartime work. Most of my respondents, however, became active outside these structures. For them, private and social connections provided an important social infrastructure for broader participation. Many became active when close friends, colleagues, university classmates or other people they knew asked for help or wound up in a precarious situation. Entrepreneurs were especially likely to be approached for assistance, and they responded by either volunteering or providing material or human resources. They also used their management knowledge and business contacts to substantially expand the scope and efficiency of volunteering. Other volunteers found out about volunteer networks through media and publicly available information; for them, existing ties were not the path to involvement. The scope of the needs and the common awareness of the precarious situation in the army made it easy for people of diverse economic and social backgrounds to contribute with a varying degree of commitment.

These empirical findings give us an opportunity to revise the theoretical framework of the wartime mobilization of civilians. Previous studies indicate that pre-existing formal networks serve as an infrastructure for wartime mobilization (Skocpol, Munson, Karch, and Camp 2002; Kage 2010). In the case of Ukraine, where past levels of associational life have been characterized as low and the degree of informality as high, attention should be directed to the potential of social,

professional and familial connections for broader mobilization and to the factors that transform private ties into public initiatives. We need to consider the embeddedness of individuals in various kinds of support networks and ask how these support networks, by anchoring individuals during economic and political instability, can serve as the basis of public engagement.

Some studies have moved in this direction, with scholars rethinking the potential for collective mobilization in Ukraine. Krasynska and Martin (2017) look at the informal and formal dimensions of the Maidan initiatives, revising the question of the strength and weakness of civil society. Their focus on the institutionalization of informal networks on Maidan and the emergence of social regulation mechanisms provides a fresh venue for investigations of self-organisation modes not captured by a focus on formal organisations. Similarly, the special issue “Civil Society in Ukraine: Building on EuroMaidan Legacy” (Burlyuk et al. 2017) re-assesses the claims of the weakness and impotence of civil society in Ukraine and Eastern Europe more generally. These studies broaden the scope of analysis away from formally established organisations to include social and private groups that are not registered, but participate in various initiatives and partake in public life.

When approached from this perspective, the potential for collective action in “passive societies,” like Ukraine, can appear stronger than previously assumed. The challenge is to analyze empirically what factors can propel the reconfiguration of private and entrepreneurial ties in a way that injects broader concerns into them. I suggest that in times of crisis, two points should be taken into consideration. The first one is the role of local concerns in the environment of instability and heightened fears. Worries about own families and peaceful life have the potential to disrupt previous patterns of behavior, broadening the scope of concerns from private to public and engaging individuals in initiatives hitherto unfamiliar to them. The analysis of local concerns

should be conducted with close attention to the political and social environment within which collective action takes place as well as in relation to the dynamics of unfolding warfare. The territorial unevenness of mass displacement and violence spillover can be important indicators of the ways collective action unfolds and gains sway. The (in)ability of local and national bureaucratic institutions to cope with the consequence of war can point to the spaces open for non-state engagement. Such an analysis, thus, has to be grounded in social, political and geographical realities of war-impacted communities.

The second consideration has to do with the role of “affect” in mobilising individuals in wartime. As war causes suffering and precarity at a great scale, previously disengaged individuals can feel compelled to react to the hardships and anguish of others. In doing so, they draw on the gendered understandings of care, support and an appropriate course of action. In Ukraine, as my findings suggest, previously available models of femininity, most notably women’s mothering role and their cultural role as Berehynias, drove and structured mobilization at the rear in numerous ways. Theoretical reflections about civilian efforts in wartime should investigate how cultural and gender norms are implicated in wartime mobilization, making it possible for individuals to draw on their seemingly private feelings and emotions in order to animate public engagement. As the “public/private” divide is not fixed, studies of civilian engagement should focus on the ways civilians employ available norms and reinterpret them in light of wartime experiences. Again, this analysis requires attention to the settings and socio-political realities within which collective action occurs.

This dissertation also emphasized the need to diversify our conceptual vocabulary when analysing collective action in wartime. It contends that we should go beyond the civil society narrative to capture the diverse, often contradictory, developments that grow from war realities. In

my research, I used the concept of “identity formation” to follow the ways civilian volunteers altered their gender, national, language and citizen identities. The use of these identity sub-categories captures diverse but complementary changes in the ways volunteers came to redefine their roles, obligations and relations with respect to the community, the nation and the state. These changes, I contend, should be analyzed in conjunction with the practical preoccupations of individuals, the social and local situatedness of war experiences and shifting modes of mobility and socializing in wartime. Treating these dynamics seriously permits a more rigorous and grounded analysis of the realities that are constitutive of identity renegotiations.

I find that war, volunteering experiences and wartime socialising had a profound effect on the ways volunteers see themselves and articulate their own roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis others. First, many strengthened their identification with Ukraine, Ukrainian culture and history and established allegiance to the Ukrainian state. The crystallisation of national identification with Ukraine has been reinforced by the war-induced “splitting” effect with my respondents positioning Russia as “the other” and redefining their belonging in response. The result of it was the weakening of local and pan-ethnic identification that some of my respondents had embraced before the war and strengthening national identification instead. As my data indicate, the inter-regional cooperation and exchanges brought about by war played an important role in strengthening a sense of national unity and cohesion among volunteers. This unity was achieved through forward-looking imaginings about the common future of Ukraine and reinterpretations of the past events to accord with new war experiences. These reinterpretations aligned volunteers from Eastern and Southern Ukraine close to those from the West, homogenizing the narratives about the past.

The outbreak of war and shifting national identification also impacted language identities of volunteers. Particularly, Russophone volunteers increasingly identified with the

Ukrainian language at symbolic, emotional and cultural levels. Some attuned their socio-linguistic practices accordingly, but the majority continued to rely on Russian for everyday communication. New discourses about nation, language and state appeared, decoupling language and state allegiance. At the same time, the war revitalized old discourses that posited language use as a security threat and questioned the loyalty of Russian speakers. War strengthened the argumentation of both sides, keeping language use politicized and socially contested. The reinterpretation of language ideologies and changes in linguistic practices are indicative of the reinterpretation of what constitutes a nation and who can count as a legitimate member of it.

My findings also suggest that the reinterpretation of national belonging and language identities were accompanied by shifts in the gender identities of volunteers. War-time mobilization in Ukraine unfolded along gendered lines since men were predominantly engaged as soldiers and saw their duties in relation to warfare. For their part, women became active in assisting and supporting men at war. Affective gendered solidarities emerged between female volunteers and male combatants with many women investing their energy in emotional support of those on the front. Amidst the intense war engagement, affective labour, and trauma mediation, women's understanding of gender responsibilities shifted. They came to see men as defenders and decision makers and themselves as supporting them in diverse ways, reinterpreting gender distinctions in more essentialist terms. These reinterpretations increased the social recognition of “militarised masculinity” – an understanding of manhood in relation to warfare and “caregiver femininity” – an understanding of womanhood in relation to care and support.

The changes in national, language and gender identities reshaped the ways individuals position themselves as citizens. Many abandoned their initially negative attitude to collective action as useless and inefficient, putting their citizen identity within a collective framework and

overcoming previously individualistic modes of engagement. Negative perceptions about political action by and large remained intact, with volunteers adhering to a community-oriented model of citizenship and largely withdrawing from politics. The profoundly social nature of volunteering made my respondents rethink their attitudes towards those around them and perceive other community members in a better light. As a result, they positioned themselves differently with respect to community, nation, and the state, and expressed a higher degree of interest to stay engaged in the future. This positioning was gendered, however, and conceived within a national framework, with individuals identifying with like-minded people and directing their energies in gender-differentiated ways.

Together, these changes represent a profound transformation in the ways volunteers saw their roles and responsibilities. The revisions of own roles and responsibilities, situated in war-realities, allowed my respondents to re-establish the meaningfulness of life in a time of instability and destruction. By and large, these developments speak to larger transformations of social and political realities in Ukraine, including the formation of national sentiments, the relationship of gender identity to nation making and citizenship, and language ideology reformulations in wartime.

Looking ahead, some ambivalence remains about the questions posed by this dissertation. One has to do with the plural, fluid and contested nature of identities. While my research findings indicate some ways volunteers made sense of war realities and changed their behavior based on new understandings, we should generalize these findings with caution. The situated nature of identity formation presupposes that other forms of meaning making might have emerged amidst the war. For example, the participation of women in the military, however marginal, might have brought about other forms of gender identity renegotiation. By the same

token, the contested nature of war that made female volunteers to work hard supporting combatants emotionally may indicate the fragility of “militarised masculinity” in Ukraine and its openness to unmaking after demobilization. Understanding where and how military experience creates alienation and fosters resistance outside of the front and volunteer communities would help us outline the mechanisms of demilitarisation and shed light on the trajectories of war veterans after war. Similarly, investigating the ways military service is recognised beyond the front could shed light on the extent to which political, public and private life have become militarised or masculinized in Ukraine. As war-induced transformations are complex and not linear, attention should be directed to investigating the diversity and fluidity of changes. Accounting for changes in the socio-political environment is critical in such an analysis, as identity formation is mediated by political, economic and social realities.

Ambivalence also remains regarding the extent to which we can generalize the findings of this research within regions and across Ukraine. This analysis is restricted in scope; among others, its timing, regional focus and spotlight on active grassroots volunteer communities present limitations that should be addressed in future research. A constructive approach would be to study the extent to which the views of the volunteers align with those of the larger community in the region. It would give a better sense of the effects of war socializing on the attitudes of volunteers and highlight the points of contention within regions, not across them. This analysis is important, as my findings attest to a widening intraregional polarization, with volunteers cutting ties with those holding opposing or different views. Many indicated that their social circles radically changed in the course of volunteering, becoming more homogenous politically, but more diverse linguistically and socially. Tackling this and similar issues would yield a richer analysis of how identities change amidst war and with what effects on the social cohesion of communities. As local

dynamics were important to this particular civilian mobilization, looking across regions may generate more insights into how civilians mobilize and what sustains their engagement. Combining this analysis with a thorough investigation of state policies, most notably the decommunization and Europeanization efforts made by the national elites, should give a better indication of how national discourses become appropriated and renegotiated at the local level. Similarly, the ways politicians mobilize “affect” and encourage citizens to feel a certain way should be analyzed in conjunction with citizens’ self-governing strategies (see Johnson 2010).

The evolution of volunteer networks since the timing of the fieldwork and their shifting relations with state institutions represent another area for investigation. The volunteer initiatives I studied represent diverse and hybrid forms of cooperation with the state. Volunteer engagement on the large scale altered the state/citizen relations, yet the implications of this remain largely unknown. One of the few studies conducted on the subject is that of Zarembo (2017). She states that war volunteers simultaneously strengthened the state by providing necessary assistance and weakened it by making the state reliant on societal support. Understanding how these modes of engagement influence volunteers’ conceptualizations of the state; what models of citizenship they promote and to what effects to the capacities of the state is a fruitful venue for future research.

Disengagement amidst emotional exhaustion and increasing disillusionment in the country represents another recent development. Surveys indicate that the number of those donating resources and providing direct assistance to the army and displaced persons has declined since 2015 (Corestone Group and GfK 2018). Future studies should look into who stays engaged and how long-term engagement differs from the initial phases of mobilization. Answering such questions would give us an idea of whether groups that emerge amidst war institutionalize and, if so, how this institutionalization changes the landscape of public participation in Ukraine.

Ultimately, the findings could speak to the issue of formality and informality in the public sector; they might also indicate whether the war represented a rupture in social organisation and to what effect.

Methodologically, ethnographic tools of inquiry and in-depth case studies should be employed more consistently to tackle these questions and to contextualize the research findings derived by other methods. Direct engagement with social actors wherein researchers speak *with*, not *for* or *about* others (Caddick et al. 2017) is particularly productive as it opens up a space for deepening our understanding of the inner logic of social and political patterns and contributes to the ethically sound ways of generating insights about social and political transformations. While engaging directly with research participants, researchers should also reflect on how their fieldwork alters them, thus unlearning old ways of thinking and creating new possibilities for theorizing. The unsettling nature of unlearning, especially in an environment of war, requires the researcher to practice the responsibility of care in relation to both the research participants and themselves. Conversations about the challenges faced in the field and the ways they influence our perceptions and identities would be productive in ensuring the integrity of the research and the researcher.

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Photo 5.1 (by author). June 2015, Kharkiv. “Hope is in you, soldier. Ukraine.” The poster was authorized by Ukraine’s Ministry of Defense.



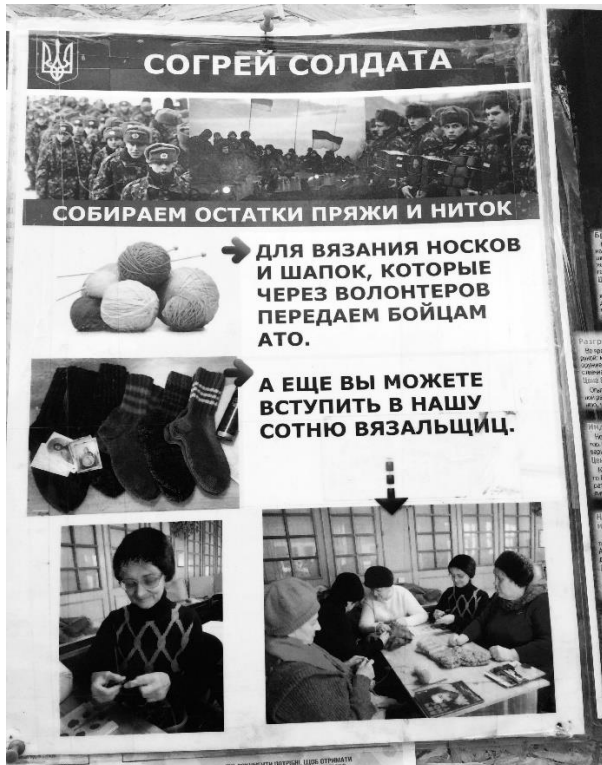
Photo 5.2 (by author). July 2015, Odesa. Sign on the package to the front prepared by female volunteers from “Berehynia” network reads: “Dear, beloved defenders! [We] are waiting you all back at home, alive! Your girls))”



Photo 5.3 & 5.4 (by author). Female volunteers of “Berehynia” making an icon (left) and female volunteers from Kharkiv decorating war artifacts to sell and collect money for the soldiers (right)



Photo 5.5 & 5.6 (by author). June 2015, Kharkiv. “Warm up the soldier; Collecting yarn for knitting socks and hats to be sent to the ATO combatants by volunteers. Also, you can join our squad of (female) knitters” (left) and “Feed the soldier. Culinary Forces will always come to your aid!” (right).



Material 5.7 The slogan of the female-only protest in Odesa, July 2015, to protest the appointment of Maria Gaidar as Head of the Social Policy Department in the Odesa region. Original text is available at iPress UA (2015) “Nelzia naznachat’.”

I am a volunteer

I am a woman

I am carrying the weight of our war on my shoulders

I am purchasing uniforms and thermal surveillance devices

I am helping the wounded

I am conducting negotiations to release those taken hostage

I am receiving soldiers’ remains

I am supporting the families of those who died

I am helping IDPs to survive

I am carrying out the functions of the state

and I know wholeheartedly who is Ukraine is fighting against.

I am against public service appointments of those candidates who can’t answer this question.

Moreover, the public servant who would take care of the social policy.

I don’t want to pay salary to “a celebrity”. I need an efficient manager on this position, who knows without doubt: Russia is killing Ukrainians.

Only that kind of candidate will be able to look in the eyes of mothers and wives of those who died in the war, waged by Russia on the territory of my country. Or face internally displaced persons from Crimea or Donbas.

I don’t want an appointee from the aggressor-state

I am against the appointment of Maria Gaidar

and tomorrow I will say it out loud to be heard.

Photo 6.1 (by author). July 2015, Odesa. “Eternal memory to heroes of Ukrainian-Russian war”



Photo 6.2 (by author). July 2015, Odesa. “Unannounced war as it is”. Photo exhibit.



Photo 6.3 (by author). July 2015, Nikopol. Ukrainian traditional concert to greet volunteers during their recreational trip

