Sense Of Belonging In LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians Amidst The Full-Scale War With Russia

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of a bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 25,945 words

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Signed: Eugenia (Yevheniia) Seleznova

Abstract

My thesis explores how LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians negotiate and navigate their sexual and national belonging amidst the full-scale Russian war against Ukraine, being intersecitonally minoritized through Ukrainian heteronormative biopolitics, Russian aggression, and Western European racialization. The necessity of the research is dictated by existing gaps in the literature on Ukrainian nationalism and sexuality interconnections; my research aims to add a decolonial perspective to existing debates, with respect to Russian colonialism. The research is based on 17 qualitative interviews conducted with LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians of various backgrounds, including various histories of (non)displacement due to the war, and an anonymous poll including 38 responses from a diverse group of Ukrainians. The thesis covers the topics of LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians' experiences of growing up queer and Ukrainian within Russian coloniality; minoritization of those who fled to Europe due to their nationality; occurring "cleavage" in Ukrainian society between "those who stayed" and "those who left" due to the war, and of spatiotemporal aspects of belonging, manifesting themselves in placing a locus of agential investment. The research engages with the frameworks of disidentification and queer utopian futurity by Jose Esteban Munoz (1999; 2009), coloniality by Maria Lugones (2010) and Madina Tlostanova (2012), intersectionality (following Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), decentering sexuality studies from the West (following Kulpa and Miezelinska, 2011) and respectability of the nation built through gender and sexuality regulations by George Mosse (1985). Following my empirical findings, I argue that the intersectionality and decoloniality approaches should be employed when assessing connections between Ukrainian national identity and queerness, in order to avoid an oversimplification of Ukrainian queers' attachment to their nationhood as assimilationist.

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Introduction

24th February 2022 was the day that put Ukraine in the news all over the world, making the global public almost inescapably aware of actual relations between Ukraine and Russia, ever since the dissolution of the USSR widely perceived as "brotherly Slavic states".

This was also the morning when I woke up in my apartment in the South Ukrainian city of Odesa for the last time — like many others, at 4-something AM, to the sounds of explosions following a short night of suffocating dreams. A few weeks later I took my chosen family to Austria, leaving behind my parents, my home with 72 plants, and a cool new job I was about to start. A few months later, I started a Master's program in Gender Studies at CEU, where I applied shortly upon my arrival in Vienna. The text you're going to read is a result of my research conducted within my studies.

As I was figuring out the topic of my research, the notions of gender, sexuality, and non-belonging drove my choice. I've never been at home with gendered expectations of how I should act and look, first as a "girl", and then as a "woman". Neither did I feel at home with discourses around "performing Ukrainianness[1]" which filled the whole of my information bubble soon after the full-scale invasion started: even though through my values and political beliefs I match a lot of them effortlessly, the fact that I'm now supposed to base most of my words and actions on my origin felt odd, especially given that these discourses don't always care to correspond with each other[2].

At the same time, I was observing through social media how differently my numerous LGBTQIA+ Ukrainian friends and fellows reacted to the same situation. Almost equally not protected and recognized enough by the state and the society, some of them shared bitter observations of how differently they felt as queers in the EU countries; some claimed vocally their belonging and boundedness to Ukraine, — and some simply went silent.

I started wondering how it works; why in seemingly same situations belonging works differently for seemingly equally oppressed people — or what am I overlooking in their situations, that makes them actually different. The literature I was finding couldn't fill in my interest, mainly stating that in Ukrainian queerhood some members do sense themselves more

[1] Following Bhabha's theory of "nation as a performative act" (Bhabha, 2004, in Kulpa, 2011, 52).

[2] Another fact that didn't make things easier was my very mixed ethnic origins, "including but not limited to" Korean, Jewish, and Tatarian. Each of my ancestry strands already bears its own historical trauma, such as of my Jewish grandpa facing antisemitism in the USSR, or my Korean grandma's family deported across Asia from the Soviet Far East in 1937 by Stalin's order. Integrating an overlap of national and ethnical traumas, fresh and old, while surviving ongoing war and displacement is a puzzling task.

discursively included in the nationhood, and some do less[3] — but not fully answering my question of *why* an individual finds oneself on a certain side of belonging. At the same time, I believed the question was important: not only for my personal reasons but also for the future post-war reconstruction of Ukrainian society as hopefully more inclusive and powerful[4]. Thus I considered the sense of belonging in LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians amidst the full-scale war as the final topic for my Master's research. I formulated my main research question as the following:

> "How do LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians navigate and negotiate their sexual and national identities and belonging, while being intersectionally (after Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) minoritized?"

By intersectional minoritization I mean their simultaneous subjectedness to Ukrainian heteronormative biopolitics (after Foucault, 1979/2008), Russian imperialist oppression (after Kuzio, 2015a), and "intra-European othering" (after Hudabiunigg, 2004; Tlostanova, 2017), where in the Western European geopolitical hierarchies Ukrainians together with the other Eastern Europeans appear to be on "lower ranks" (after Tlostanova, 2017).

Putting together notions of queerness and "Ukrainianness", and seeing how they interact with each other amidst both being a site of oppression, allows me, first, to reexamine notions of "Ukrainian homopatriotism", permeating Ukrainian scholarly debates prior to the full-scale invasion (see Leksikov and Rachok, 2020; Plakhotnik, 2022; Rechiashvili, 2022), and, second, situate LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians' belonging in wider debates on European homoexceptionalism (see Kulpa and Miezelinska, 2011; Kahlina, 2013, 2014) and Eastern European coloniality (see Tlostanova, 2012). I also aim to capture and analyze a newly occurring and quickly evolving phenomenon of the division between Ukrainians who stay and leave the country amidst the war, and how this division affects belonging in already othered LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians.

The thesis is structured in the following way: in the first two chapters, I'm outlining the theoretical frameworks I'm using and the topical literature I'm engaging with, together with the brief historical background of the issue. Next, in the Methodology chapter, I describe my methods, sample, ethical concerns, and limitations. My findings are outlined in four

[3] My main sources on the issue were Olga Plakhotnik's dissertation on imaginary sexual citizenship in Ukraine (Plakhotnik, 2019) and Maryna Shevtsova's work on post-Euromaidan LGBT activism, see more in the Lit. Review chapter.

[4] Following Foucault's understanding of power as fuel for constructive changes (Foucault, 1980, cited in Sawicki, 1986).

analytical chapters, dealing consequently with the following issues: Russian coloniality in the post-Soviet Ukraine and how it affected national and queer identities shaping; racialization of displaced Ukrainians in Western Europe; growing societal hiatus between those who left and those who stayed amidst the full-scale war, and, finally, the narrations of belonging and non-belonging among queer Ukrainians, and their spatiotemporal situatedness; the whole of my analysis summarized in the Conclusions chapter. Appendices contain the oral consent script, the provisional interview guide I was using, and a questionnaire I used for an anonymous poll in the late stage of my research.

Chapter 1. Theoretical Framework

Introduction

In this chapter, I will outline briefly the main theoretical frameworks I was using to support my research. My research engages numerous issues, such as coloniality, nationalism and gender, heterosexism, intersectionality, and Eastern European power and knowledge geographies. On most of them, a variety of theories and frameworks is already available. For my research, I chose to engage with those which, to my understanding, would fit my research tasks the best, and also could be transferred from their original context to the Ukrainian; some of the theories I'm dealing with, like Madina Tlostanova's on coloniality, are of key importance for my arguments. Connecting frameworks listed below allows me to build a picture of what I argue to be an intersectional minoritization of LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians, and examine various factors affecting their belonging and identity interplays.

1.1. Coloniality

The most important theoretical ground for my thesis is the notion of coloniality as explained by Maria Lugones (Lugones, 2010), who is known for developing gender perspective in decolonial theory, and by Madina Tlostanova who expanded decolonial scholarship to post-Soviet and Eurasian contexts (Tlostanova, 2010, 2012, 2017).

Lugones expanded and complicated Annibal Quijano's understanding of coloniality as a modern racialized capitalist organization of power and knowledge (Quijano, 1991, 1995, in Lugones, 2010, 745) to a power and knowledge system not only built around race but also imposing heterosexist gender order on the colonized (Lugones, 2010). She described how a "human-non human" hierarchy grounded colonial modernity, where only white heterosexual men were "fully human"; white heterosexual women were "inverted humans", and colonized non-white people were deemed "less than human", installing heterosexist gender order becoming a part of the "civilizing mission" (ibid, 743-745). "Decolonizing gender", according to Lugones, should start with "learning about other resisters", "dropping colonial enchantment with 'woman'" (ibid, 753), and creating a communality of resisters (ibid, 752).

Madina Tlostanova elaborated how populations that fell under Russian, and later Soviet imperialism, suffered the "disease" of "mind-colonization" no less than Western European transatlantic colonies did (Tlostanova, 2012, 132), Russia becoming a "second-rate" and "Janus-faced" empire (ibid, 134-136) — oppressing her subalterns while "feeling somewhat subaltern to the West herself". The "Russian/Soviet Empire" (ibid, 135), according

to Tlostanova, produced a "mutant coloniality" (ibid, 132), built around class and ideology rather than race, but still dehumanizing those who were about to be colonized (ibid, 132-133). Gender and sexuality, however, were an inexplicable part of "modern imperial and colonial discourses" constructed across this empire, together with class and religion (ibid, 136).

Tlostanova's focus on gender mostly addresses Russian former and current colonial subjects in Central Asia (Tlostanova, 2010); as for Ukraine, she puts it in a category of "confusing" "colonies", which can "claim belonging or closeness to Europe to a larger degree than Russia itself" (Tlostanova, 2012, 135), and where the colonial "difference" "cannot be easily conceptualized through ethnicity" (ibid), making a "second-rate empire never really sure of itself in the presence of the west" (ibid). In her later work, Tlostanova outlined in more detail how the "Second World" (post-socialist Eastern European) countries are becoming "subalterns" to the West (Tlostanova, 2017). Using her framework permits me to elaborate on the intersectional minoritization of Ukrainians through Russian colonialism and (Western) European racialization.

1.2. Eastern European sexual geographies and "Western-centrism"

An important part of my framework, as I constantly operate with the notions of Europe, Europeanness and "the West", is to define what actually counts as Europe. My understanding of what is Europe and how it relates to Ukraine and Ukrainian LGBTQIA+ people is grounded on the notion of Central and Eastern Europe as a "contemporary periphery", outlined by Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielinska (Kulpa and Mizielinska, 2011, 11-23), where Central and Eastern Europe appear to be "'European enough' geographically, but 'not yet Western' temporarily" (ibid, 23). In their framework, the West signifies a "normative ideal of how things should be" (ibid, 22), which Central and Eastern Europe are aiming to reach — synchronizing with Tlostanova's elaboration on colonial modernity as a necessarily developmentalist project (Tlostanova, 2012). Queerness, according to Kulpa, appears to be one of the central grounds of the "us" and "them" division installed by "the West" for Central and Eastern Europe, the latter positioned as "backward" in terms of LGBTQIA+ inclusion, and in need of "pedagogy" in order to "catch up" (Kulpa, 2011, 49-50).

However, insofar as the "division" between Western and Central-Eastern Europe is often drawn upon the borders of the former Eastern bloc, it wouldn't be fair to say that, for example, Poland, Ukraine, and Belarus are currently on the same geopolitical scales; Poland's inclusion in the "European club" (Kulpa and Miezelinska, 2011) via NATO and EU makes a

crucial difference in terms of geopolitical safety as well as in terms of Polish nationals' freedom to live within EU. Thus wherever I'm addressing the notion of Europe throughout my research, I'm addressing its current dominant transnational structure, the EU.

Another scholar whose work shaped my understanding of "the West" in this research was Kath Weston who described how the "gay imaginary" forms patterns of queer migration (Weston, 1995). In her work, it was mostly about rural US gays departing to join the "gay imaginary" of the big cities, especially those "reputable" as "gay-friendly" like San Francisco, hoping to find a community where they would be accepted; however, it often appeared that where homo/heterosexual division is less present, racial and class divisions came in play, causing bitter disillusioning (ibid). I use the term "gay imaginary" to describe my respondents' expectations from moving to the EU as well as the outcomes when LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians appear to be minoritized through nationality. Their initial objective reason for migration — escaping the direct physical threat of Russian missiles and occupation — is nevertheless dramatically different from what Weston observed in her research.

1.3. Intersectionality

As in my work I consider Ukrainian LGBTQIA+ people to be intersectionally minoritized through Russian colonial aggression, European racialization, and heterosexist Ukrainian biopolitics, the mere framework of intersectionality as outlined by Kimberle Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) appears to be crucial for my research.

Using the example of black women struggling with employment in the ways neither white women nor black men had to, Crenshaw shows how being "on the intersection" of more than one minoritized identity makes fighting the oppression harder (Crenshaw, 1991, 1241). As she shows, not only it can be hard for intersectionally minoritized subjects to achieve justice as the mere intersectionality of their experiences often gets erased and invisible, but also their oppressed identities can come into conflict with each other, like, for example, gender-based violence in black communities can get silenced in order to avoid fuelling stereotypes over black men's brutality (Crenshaw, 1989, 159-160). I was facing the same difficulties when talking to some of my respondents, who seemed to be avoiding or softening their criticisms of Ukrainian biopolitics towards LGBTQIA+: more than that, I've been constantly feeling this pressure myself while writing, sensing inner resistance to writing something that could "discredit" my country and the society I'm coming from.

1.4. Nationalism and gender

As LGBTQIA+ people's belonging to the nation is one of the key issues I'm researching, it is important to consider what nation and nationalism actually are in the scope of my research. To do so, I'm primarily engaging with Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983). He describes the nation as a political entity based on an imagined communion between the members of a nation-state society, who may "never know most of their fellow-members" (ibid, 6), and yet feel a deep sense of kinship, close to a religious belief (ibid, 5). Anderson dismisses the notion of nationalism as necessarily negative, fuelling hatred and detachment, reminding that, instead, attachment to one's nation is an inspirational source of love (ibid, 141-154), unlike racism primarily based on wishing well for one's own community rather than pursuing the destruction of "the Other" (ibid).

Anderson's analysis despite its usefulness has been criticized for several flaws, namely lack of attention to the embodied experiences (Ringmar, 2021); inattentiveness to gender (Hall, 1993; Davis, 1998); lack of postcolonial perspective (Chatterjee, 1999). To replenish his overlooked gender perspective for my thesis, I'm using George Mosse's framework on gender and nationalism, and how demands on proper gendered behavior are perceived as a core to preserving a nation's respectability (Mosse, 1985). However, Mosse's paradigm, itself largely Western-centric and not taking into account Eastern European power dynamics (Kulpa, 2011, 45) doesn't work for my research in detachment from the above-mentioned Eastern European coloniality (Tlostanova, 2012) and "Western-centrism" of sexualities (Kulpa and Miezelinska, 2011). As Mosse argues that gaining respectability is the main reason why nations establish their standards of proper gendered behavior and ideals of manliness and femininity, an important question is what can "respectability" mean in the Ukrainian context — post-Soviet, (post)colonial, militarized. It can appear there is no common answer to this question for different categories of the population, including the difference between perceptions of heteronormative people and LGBTQIA+, who might aim for "Europeanness" as a "respectable norm" where they, after Kulpa and Miezelinska (2011), are assumed to be more likely respected themselves.

Whether nationalism and homosexuality can somehow twist and create specific sites of privilege and exclusion has been questioned since Jasbir Puar's work on homonationalism, where she showed how US "exceptionalism" justified American intervention to the Middle East countries by "protection of homosexual citizens" (Puar, 2007). I'm not using Puar's framework and the notion of homonationalism for the Ukrainian context; although several

attempts to do so have been made by other scholars (Pagulich, 2016; Rekhiashvili, 2022), I'm taking the side of those who argue it's inapplicable for an Eastern European country being under attack (Leksikov and Rachok, 2020). Nevertheless, I'm applying the notion of homonationalism when elaborating how LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians are getting minoritized in Western Europe as Ukrainians, while perceived as equal and included as queers — and how Western European vision of itself as a "queer haven" leads to misunderstanding of queer Ukrainians' motives of leaving or staying in their home country.

1.5. Belonging and spatiotemporality

My main framework for belonging and identifications in an intersectionally minoritized subject is the one offered by Jose Esteban Munoz in his seminal work "Disidentifications. Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics" (1999). Munoz describes, engaging with performative art pieces, how queer people of color, who are also minoritized through their race, disidentify with the majority narratives about sexuality and race, by reinterpreting them and reinventing alternative meanings for common cultural symbols and discourses[5]. In my research, the disidentification concept serves to show how queer Ukrainians negotiate their belonging both to queer and to Ukrainian, often reinventing the meaning of the latter.

I'm also engaging with Munoz's framework on spatiotemporality of queerness, elaborated in his another important work, "Cruising Utopia" (2009). From this work, I'm borrowing it's key concept of queer utopian futurity, which is "always on the horizon" and, according to Munoz, should be reached through communality — to be echoed by Maria Lugones with her argument that decolonization is a communality work, too (Lugones, 2010). Munoz juxtaposes queer futurity of liberty and imaginativeness to the dull and normative "heterosexual here and now", which I find to be useful when describing the situation LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians are currently enduring while aiming for their own utopias. In my research, I show how the locus of the desired futurity can be shifted in queer people depending on their past experiences of disappointment and inability to conduct "queer worldmaking" — another concept Munoz engages with, describing how queer people of color

[5] As Munoz builds his analysis around a triad of identification, counter-identification, and disidentification, I find his term "counteridentification" be somewhat limited for my analysis, as it assumes taking a binaristic opposition to a subject, and in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war can lead to a confusing assumption that those who "counteridentify" with Ukrainians necessarily take one of the "opposite" sides and become, for example, pro-Russian. To avoid such confusion, I use "non-identification" instead where my respondents have shown neither disidentification, nor identification with a certain part of their background.

use their agency to create "queer worlds" amidst the heternormativity (Munoz, 1999, 195-200; Munoz, 2009, 37-40).

To supplement Munoz's framework with more precise spatial notions of coloniality, I also engage briefly with Gloria Anzaldua's concepts of "mestiza consciousness" and "borderlands", both brought from her "Borderlands/La Frontera" book (1987); I use them to illustrate some of the national identity shifts experienced by my respondents with respect to transnational and colonial power dynamics surrounding Ukraine, and Ukraine gaining subjectivity in these dynamics. Anzaldua described how women inhabiting "bleeding borderlands" between US and Mexico develop a "double consciousness", appearing to be racialized and minoritized in the US context. In my research, "double consciousness" serves to describe how prior to Euromaidan national identity in many of my respondents was somewhat blended, "Ukrainian" and "post-Soviet" at the same time, in the post-Soviet hierarchy Ukrainians being subalterns. The notion of border illustrates how, as Ukraine was trying to separate itself from Russian influence, tension and following collision between the two unequal powers became sensible, and led to Ukrainian national identity crystallization: for this analysis, see Chapter 4.4.

1.6. Queerness and heterosexual matrix

As my work explores how and why LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians are getting minoritized through their queerness, I'm using Judith Butler's framework on the performativity of gender and heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990, 1993) — which also appear to be of use when comparing manifestations of heteronormativity and national normativity (Kulpa, 2011, 52). Butler argued that normative images of "a man" and "a woman" are constantly reproduced through repetitive discourses, gender itself performed in a drag-like manner as becoming "a real" man or woman is never actually achievable (Butler, 1993). She also argued that we are living in a so-called "heterosexual matrix", where gender is seen as "naturally" attached to sex, and binarism of a heterosexual man and heterosexual woman is seen as a default "norm", the omnipresence of the matrix making it discreet (Butler, 1990). Butler's framework comes to use in my work, first, when I'm exploring how my respondents negotiated the environments' expectations on their gender "compliance", and, second, when I'm exploring the "authentic Ukrainian" performance and discourses.

The terms "queer" and "queerness" themselves appeared to be somewhat problematic for my research. Widely used in Anglophone feminist scholarship as well as everyday life

contexts[6], in the Ukrainian context (and, wider, in overall Eastern European / post-Soviet) the term appears to be a "floating signifier" (after Levi-Strauss, 1950/1987), foreign and deprived of it's liberatory force produced through Anglophone queers' reclaiming of a slur. In my work, still, I'm using it as an umbrella term for a non-heteronormative sexuality or gender expression, along with "queerness"; however, I'm abstaining from specifically defining my participants as "queer", using the abbreviation LGBTQIA+ instead. In general, LGBTQIA+ and "queer" can be read as interchangeable in this thesis.

Conclusion

Putting together above listed strands of decolonial theory, intersectionality, theories of nationalism and its relation to gender, Eastern European sexual geographies, and minoritized identity formation together with Butler's gender performativity (Butler, 1990) allows me to examine LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians' identifications and minoritization experience from a variety of angles, and draw a multilayered interdisciplinary picture, hopefully closing the gaps in literature outlined in the Introduction and the next chapter. Most of these theories originate from the Western Anglophone scholarship; I'm using topical Eastern European literature assets as well as a reflexivity of my own experience to transfer them as smoothly as possible to the context I'm studying.

[6] Yet also acknowledged to be problematic and ambiguous even in the "spot of origin" — see Butler, 1993.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a brief historical background of my research and outline briefly the main topical literature surrounding the issues I'm studying, namely the history of development and theories of Ukrainian nationalism and national belonging; specificities and debates around Eastern European coloniality, and relations between national and sexual belonging in Eastern Europe and Ukraine particularly. Putting these strands together allows me to see how current scholarship developed an understanding of Ukrainian queerness, coloniality, and nationalism interconnections, and where it still has gaps — in my body of argument, in assessing the effects of Russian coloniality on this interconnection.

2.1. Brief historical background

"As the USSR fell apart and Ukraine became a sovereign state in 1991, it began introducing its own sexuality politics: this included decriminalizing same-sex sexuality in 1992, but also banning same-sex marriages constitutionally since the first independent Ukraine's Constitution was introduced in 1996. Through the 1990-2000s Ukrainian LGBT rights movement was slightly developing, often with the support of Western donors. It mostly centered around fighting off discrimination and invisibility, with a number of anti-HIV/AIDS initiatives (Kasianczuk and Kodenko, 2015). In 2012 the first attempt to organize a Pride March was made in Kyiv, the capital, ending with participants being attacked and beaten by right-wing protesters (Kasianczuk and Kodenko, 2015, 26)" (Seleznova, 2023a).

In 2013-2014, two major historical events happened in Ukraine: the Euromaidan revolution, which resulted in exiling of the government of pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych and himself, and the following onset of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, with the annexation of the Crimean peninsula and armed conflict on the East of the country with the armed formation of the two proxy separatist "people's republics", "DNR" and "LNR". This resulted in the displacement of around two million people (OCHA, 2015) and long-term fights on the borders between the "republics" and state-controlled territory of Ukraine. The period between 2014 and 2022 is now often referred to as the "hybrid phase" (Snegovaya, 2015) of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The start of the war was followed by a certain activation of Ukrainian right-wing groups, also pursuing anti-gay and feminist activities such as feminist events disruption (Mayerchik and Plakhotnik, 2019); however, as

Shevtsova shows, contrary to Russian propaganda narratives, far-right nationalism never became a mainstream movement in Ukraine (Shevtsova, 2022a).

As Euromaidan claimed its main aim was "approaching Europe" and separating from Russia's political influence, sexuality gained additional political significance in Ukraine since 2013, diversity and LGBTQIA+ inclusion argued to be a part of the "European values" set by the mainstream of Ukrainian LGBT rights movement (Shevtsova, 2017). "There were many hopes for rapid legislation and societal situation improvement for the community; nevertheless, not much "liberalization" has really taken place in Ukrainian sexual politics in the following years (Shestakovskyi, Kasianczuk, and Trofymenko, 2021; Terzyan, 2022). Although some laws were improved in terms of affecting LGBTQIA+ individuals, such as the Labour Code (Kis', 2017), and the gender transitioning process (Iryskina, 2020), bills on legalizing civil partnerships and recognition of hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity are still waiting to be passed as of May 2023" (following Seleznova, 2023a).

Russian full-scale military invasion to Ukraine started on 24.02.2022 has put the question of sexuality on a new political level, as Russian anti-Ukrainian rhetorics go hand-in-hand with anti-gay rhetorics, justifying the invasion with "necessity to "denazify" Ukraine" and to "protect the traditional values" and heterosexual gender order (Putin, 2022a; 2022b). While many LGBTQIA+ people openly serve in the Ukrainian Armed Forces and participate in Ukraine's fierce fighting off Russia, since 2018 having their own union, the fact that they protect a country that doesn't grant them equal rights has refueled societal debates around marriage equality (Graham-Harrison and Mazhulin, 2023). It is expected that a bill on civil partnerships will be considered by the Ukrainian Parliament at the end of the year 2023; it faces harsh opposition from a variety of political forces, and many fear it will get stuck in the editing limbo.

"As around eight million people have left the country due to the invasion, tensions between "those who stay" and "those who left" are expected to arise (and as my research shows, already do, see Chapter 6.1). Many Ukrainians leave for the EU countries, where since March 2022 the Temporary Protection Directive grants Ukrainians rights to stay and work in a country of choice almost unrestrictedly while it's in effect. At the same time, legally male Ukrainian citizens aged 18-60, with a few exceptions, are currently prohibited from leaving the country (Shevtsova, 2022b). Thus a new site of exclusion emerges in Ukrainian society, creating additional challenges for the sense of belonging in those Ukrainian LGBTQIA+ people who considered fleeing" (Seleznova, 2023a).

2.2. Development of Ukrainian national identity

As my research addresses the navigation of senses of national and sexual belonging among Ukrainian LGBTQIA+ people, understanding existing debates on nationalism and sexuality in Ukraine is crucial for its further development. The history of Ukrainian nationalism development matters for the LGBTQIA+ Ukrainian community, first, in terms of whether perennial "traditional values" can really be as old and valuable as they are usually depicted by right-wingers, and, second, to draw a background for current debates on where does Ukraine belong geopolitically.

It is a common consensus that Ukrainian national identity started shaping itself in the 19th century (Magosci, 2002; Remy, 2016; Kiryukhin, 2015; Arel, 2022), although the Ukrainian Cossack proto-state, Zaporizhian Sich, existed before that, in 16-18th centuries. Ukrainian national identity development has been largely defined by Ukrainians being a stateless nation for a long time, "submerged" (Magosci, 2002, 55) between the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires, the latter eventually transforming into Soviet rule. Another factor to define emerging Ukrainian nationalism was Ukrainians' belonging to Slavs: as Denis Kiryukhin elaborates, up to the early 20th century Ukrainian national identity was seeking ways to develop between the three "projects": of a "pan-Slavic identity"; of independent "ethnocultural Ukrainian identity", opposed to and separated from Russians, and, finally, of so-called "Little Russian" ("*maloros*") identity, seen as a part of a bigger "All-Russian national project" started in the 18th century with the establishment of the Russian empire. The project of a separate Ukrainian nationality eventually prevailed over the other two (Kiryukhin, 2015).

The interwar Ukrainian nationalism, characterized by its continued statelessness and oppression from dominant state forces, resulting in militant underground resistance led by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) in the 1920-1930s, and after WWII by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), is commonly described as integral (Armstrong, 1955; Zaitsev, 2013, 2015; Erlacher, 2021), putting the idea of an independent Ukrainian nation "above all". This notion cast a shadow over the whole of Ukrainian nationalism, as its "integral" kind is commonly equated to fascism; Olexandr Zaitsev, however, argued it was closer to Croatian "ustashism", thus underlining the resistance to "perceived foreign oppression" in its core (Zaitsev, 2015). Nevertheless, discursive parallels between Ukrainian nationalism and fascism/Nazism still work to reinforce the narrative of "Ukrainian fascism" both in academic (see, for example, Himka, 2010; Rossolinski-Liebe, 2015) and general

public circles, the latter being a target of Kremlin propaganda narratives on "neo-Nazi Ukraine" ever since the Euromaidan revolution in 2013 (Shevtsova, 2022a). This has also played a role in some Ukrainian queer community members not willing to have anything in common with Ukrainian nationalism, and opting for the "post-Soviet commonality" or being "people of the World" instead, some examples outlined in Chapter 6.2 and 7.1.

2.3.Nationalism and belonging in Ukraine: current state of art

"After the USSR dissolution, Ukrainian nationalism was for a while seen as a "minority faith" (Wilson, 1997). "The Ukrainian nationhood" was perceived in two ways. The first — as of divided (Korostelina, 2014), with numerous "cleavages" — namely language ambiguity (Ukrainophone vs. Russophone), regionality (Eastern vs. Western), political views (pro-Russian vs. pro-Ukrainian); see more on disproving this theory in Romanova and Podolian, 2018. The second perception of Ukrainian nationhood, perhaps a more realistic one, was as amorphic, in need of consolidation, which was made possible, but still not guaranteed, by the revolution and following the onset of Russian aggression against Ukraine (Zhurzhenko, 2014). Since 2013, and prior to 2022s Russia's full-scale invasion, most authors centered their arguments on the topic around the impact of the Euromaidan revolution on Ukrainian nationalism and national identification development (Zhurzhenko, 2014; Kulyk, 2014, 2016, 2019; Kuzio, 2015b; Pop-Eleches and Robertson, 2018; Harris, 2020; Zhuravlev and Ischenko, 2020; Barrington, 2021, and others).

Most of these debates are elaborating on the prevailing elements of Ukrainian post-Euromaidan nationalism, seen as "civic" (Pop-Eleches and Robertson, 2018; Barrington, 2021), "ethnic" (Harris, 2020), or fluidly ambiguous, the latter eventually replacing the former (Zhuravlev & Ischenko, 2020). These debates aimed to figure out whether new exclusionary sites were being created after Euromaidan, "civic" nationalism was seen as potentially more "inclusive" as it wouldn't take into account ethnicity, regionality, etc. However, Zhuravlev and Ischenko argued that the idea of national belonging based on participation in Euromaidan events and support of its agenda appeared to be no less exclusive than ethnicity and language-based perceptions of belonging (Zhuravlev and Ischenko, 2020), denying belonging to the nation to those who didn't take part in Euromaidan or didn't share its values (ibid).

A process of building Ukrainian national identity through alienation from Russia has been as well observed and described, the authors mostly conclude that, following the Euromaidan and the onset of Russian aggression against Ukraine, Ukrainians opposed

themselves to Russia (and USSR as a former metropole) through language identifications and practices (Kulyk, 2014, 2019), formation of negative attitudes towards Russian government (Kuzio, 2015; Kulyk, 2016), but not through hostility towards Russian population. In my opinion, a choice to analyze the construction of Ukrainian national identity through Ukrainians' attitudes towards Russians tells even more about Russian-Ukrainian colonial dynamics, including those of knowledge production, than about the research subject of Ukrainian nationalism itself.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine launched in early 2022 added a new dimension to visions of Ukrainian nationalism, now deeming it as "grassroots", appearing from a literal "below" of the bomb shelters rather than directed by governmental discourses (Howlett, 2023), "existential", solidifying the national identity around the willingness to survive Russian aggression (Knott, 2023), and "post-colonial", where "awakening" of national identity is a sign of Fanonian "national consciousness" developing in the exodus from the oppressor (Akbaba, 2022). Thus gradual connection of nationalism theory with post- and decolonial theory is already happening in the case of Ukrainian-Russian relations; however, this strand of literature doesn't yet address sexuality and gender wide enough" (following Seleznova, 2023b).

2.4. Specificities of Eastern European and Ukrainian (post)coloniality

The issue of Russian colonialism in Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries has long been overlooked, postcolonial theorists finding it difficult to apply frameworks developed for addressing race-based transcontinental colonialism to seemingly "alike" white-skinned Slavic populations (Moore, 2001; Riabczuk, 2013). Some scholars suggest focusing more on how Eastern Europe was building its power relations with Western Europe after the dissolution of the USSR and appeared to be in unequal positions, reproducing colonial patterns of orientalism and hybridity (see Owcarzak, 2009), arguing that "racial dimensions of colonialism and post-colonialism may have limited applicability in socialist and postsocialist projects" and thus making employing postcolonial lens for the Soviet-Eastern Europe relations unviable[7] (ibid, 5). Several other authors deal as well with the issues of regional "liminality", expectations of transition between the "East" and "West", "post-socialist" and

[7] I find it rather confusing how in such studies the language of postcolonial critique was easily employed to elaborate on power inequalities between the Eastern and the Western Europe, but was at the same time rejected for the "post-Soviet studies" on the grounds of "race sameness" apparently making the postcolonial theory "inapplicable" for the case.

neoliberal, “backward” and “progressive” (Kulpa & Miezelinska, 2011; Koobak & Marling, 2014; Tlostanova, 2017; Schurko & Suchland, 2021). Tlostanova, however, frames Eastern Europe and Eurasia within the global coloniality, see more in Chapter 1.1.

Others, like Epp Annus on the case of the Baltic countries, argue that relations between the Soviet Union and its “Eastern bloc satellites” were colonial in the core, although the primary aim of the USSR towards the Baltic states was to occupy, not colonize (Annus, 2012). Concerning Ukraine, David Chioni Moore’s 2001’s work is considered seminal (Riabczuk, 2013; Mälksoo, 2022), where he elaborates on how Russia pursued in Ukraine so-called dynastic colonialism, which’s aim was to assimilate Ukrainian elites completely and erase their national identities, instilling them with Russian language and political identification (Moore, 2001). Some Ukrainian scholars, like Mykola Riabczuk, approved his theory with their own observations on how for a long time Ukrainian-speaking populations were associated with “rurality” and kept being perceived as a “subhuman race of rural bumpkins, a lower caste of kolkhoz slaves” (Riabczuk, 2013, 48); this corresponds with my own observations on growing up in “predominantly Russian-speaking” South of Ukraine, see Chapter 4.1 in more detail.

“As the Russian full-scale invasion has expectedly galvanized the topic, more elaborations on the nature and reasons for its persisting imperialism have occurred (Mälksoo, 2022; Akbaba, 2022), the Russian-Ukrainian war has been deemed a “war of existential nationalisms” (Kuzio, 2023; Knott, 2023), where Ukraine fights for its survival as a nation, and Russia fights for reassuring it’s imperialist image of the “Great Russia”. Madina Tlostanova’s notion of Russia as a “secondary empire” with a “fixed role” in the world order after the USSR dissolution (Tlostanova, 2012) is generally of use to explain Russia’s current attempts to rewrite this order and take a more powerful position” (Seleznova, 2023c).

2.5. Sexuality and national belonging in Eastern Europe

A number of authors were dealing specifically with Eastern European queer (non)belonging, with a visible focus on Russia and “Western Eastern Europe” — “post-socialist” EU member states (Essig, 1999; Healey, 2018; Graff, 2006, 2010; Mole, 2016, 2018; Renkin, 2009). This strand of literature largely evolves around LGBTQIA+ people negotiating amidst post-socialist transitions their belonging to the nation, often bearing homophobic attitudes, and to transnational queer communities (Renkin, 2009; Graff, 2006); the politicization of homophobia (Graff, 2010), and post-Soviet queer migration and negotiation of transnational belonging (Mole, 2016, 2018).

The debates on Ukrainian nationalism and its relation to sexuality have been long permeating scholarly discourses, the former often being equated to far-rightism and heterosexism (see, for example, Mayerchik and Plakhotnik, 2019). Especially after the 2013s Euromaidan revolution and following the onset of the Russian-Ukrainian war, feminist scholars were concerned with how transformations in Ukrainian society and reconstruction of national idea as breaking ties with Russia and approaching Europe, might or might not change Ukrainian perceptions of gender and sexuality, and leave space for Ukrainian queers to develop and pursue their positionality (Ryabchuk, 2014; Martsenyuk, 2016; Channell-Justice, 2017; Polegkiy, 2018; Martsenyuk and Troian, 2018; Mayerchik and Plakhontik, 2019; Ketelaars, 2019; Terzyan, 2022). Those members of the Ukrainian LGBTQIA+ community who supported discourses of national unity and resistance were often assessed as "homonationalist" (Pagulich, 2016) or "homopatriotic" (Plakhotnik, 2019), a negative definition in terms of "aligning with the state agenda" and losing potentiality to reestablish existing power relations — simply saying, losing revolutionary and solidarity spirit (Pagulich, 2016; Plakhotnik, 2019; Mayerchik and Plakhotnik, 2019).

What, however, was frequently overlooked by those worried about the impact of "growing Ukrainian nationalism" on the Ukrainian LGBTQIA+ community, was the reason causing such growth, namely the transnational pressure on Ukraine steaming from various actors — Russia's aggression, that, according to Shevtsova, causes growth of patriotism "naturally" (Shevtsova, 2018) along with "the West's" "pressure to comply" in order to be allowed "entering the club" (following Kulpa and Miezelinska, 2011). Russia's escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian war and launching of the 2022s full-scale invasion of Ukraine has finally drawn wider attention to the necessity of bridging Ukrainian nationalism studies with postcolonial studies (Akbaba, 2022), adding to older debates on Ukrainian nationalism being rather "civic" (Kuzio, 2010) or rather "ethnocentric" (Harris, 2020) the notion of being "anticolonial" (Akbaba, 2022), following Fanon's framework of decolonized nations first going through the phase of "national consciousness" and separating from the colonizer prior to reestablishing international relations from a new positionality (Fanon, 1963, cited in Akbaba, 2022).

Regarding Ukrainian queer and feminist studies, the notion of coloniality in recent scholarship was rather addressing Ukraine's relations with Europe (Plakhotnik, 2019; Husakouskaya and Gressgard, 2020), and how the fight for LGBTQIA+ rights could get instrumentalized in line with the EU "leveraged pedagogy", (Kulpa, 2014) pursuing gender equality and tolerance as a sign of "Europeanness", the "backward" (Todorova, 2005) post-

socialist countries apparently needing to "catch up" with (Kulpa and Miezelinska, 2011). In these terms, the growing significance of "approaching Europe" discourse among LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians was seen as willing to "break from one imperial center for the sake of loyalty to the other" (Plakhotnik, 2019, 104). Meanwhile, Russia's symbiotic anti-Ukrainian and anti-queer discourses were largely assessed by scholars from the external viewpoint, studying how they affected Russia and Russians themselves (Riabov and Riabova, 2014; Morris and Garibyan, 2021; Cooper-Cunningham, 2022), but seldomly taking a closer look on how Russia could influence Ukrainian queers before the full-scale invasion.

Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined several main strands of topical literature tangent to my research, namely the development and theories of Ukrainian nationalism; debates on Eastern European coloniality, and how sexuality interacts with national belonging in post-socialist countries, with a focus on Ukraine.

While Eastern Europe's and Ukraine's particularly subaltern position within Western Europe is well represented in the Anglophone literature, the issue of Russia's colonialism in the region remains debated and underrepresented; existing literature on sexual belonging and nationalism in Ukraine also tends to overlook the issue, focusing more on critiques of Western-centric power and knowledge production systems. In my research, I aim to cover this gap by equally addressing both Russian and Western European power imbalances towards Ukraine.

Chapter 3. Methods

In this chapter, I will outline the methodology of my research: sampling techniques and methods I was using; technicalities and difficulties I had to deal with, and ethical considerations. I will also set out my positionality and describe some of the limitations my research has faced.

3.1. Core method and sampling

"My research is based on semi-structured qualitative interviews, the choice of the method explained with a necessity to deal with highly abstract, personal, unmeasurable, and impalpable notions to answer my research question" (Seleznova, 2023d). Initially, I conducted 18 interviews in March-April 2023. 17 were used for my analysis as one of the interviews suffered low sound quality due to a breaking internet connection at my interviewee's, and was too difficult to transcribe properly.

I've used a multiple snowball sampling technique (after Parker, Scott, and Geddes, 2019) to collect my respondents' group; "first, I have made a Facebook post with a detailed explanation of my project, requirements for participation, and an invitation for those interested to reach out. In the second iteration, my friends from the queer community and some of my interviewees spread my post in several closed community chats" (Seleznova, 2023d). My sample consisted of 17 LGBTQIA+ individuals holding Ukrainian citizenship, who were permanently residing in Ukraine as of 24.02.22, and either left the country afterward or stayed. Among those of my respondents who went abroad, all except one were residing in Western European countries, the EU and the UK, at the moment of interviewing, one person residing in a former "Eastern Bloc" EU state.

The age of my respondents varied from 19 to 50, with an average of 31,2 and a median of 28 y. o. Most of my respondents were coming from big cities either in the North-East of Ukraine, South, or Central East — all of them commonly perceived as "predominantly Russian-speaking". The majority of my respondents either already had a university degree, or were pursuing their higher education at the moment of the interview. My sample included several people who initially fled the country, but came back in a few months; people from Crimea and Donetsk regions with a history of double displacement; a person with a disability, and one military servant.

3.2. Conducting and analyzing the interviews

Due to time, financial, and especially safety constraints posed by the war, the interviews were conducted via Zoom. At the beginning of each interview I explained the details of my project and obtained oral consent for participation and recording; see Appendix 1 for my oral consent script.

Most interviews lasted 60-90 minutes. I was using a guide of 10 open-ended (following Ritchie, 1995; Roulston, 2018) questions concerning national and queer belonging, identification, war experiences, displacement, and embodiment: see Appendix 2 for the full list. "However, in most of my interviews, I started by asking my respondents to tell a little about themselves, and some of my questions were getting answered then. Some of my interviewees reached out already with a story they were willing to tell (for example, of "moving from Ukraine to an "LGBT-paradise" because of the war"): in this case, I started by asking them to tell me this story. I adjusted my guide during each interview, dropping irrelevant or potentially harmful questions; in most cases, I used only 5-6 questions from my 10-question guide. At the end of each interview, I asked if there is anything else my respondents would like to add (following Roulston, 2018); we also agreed on how would we keep in touch — as a rule, that I would offer them quotes for approval if I consider using any in my thesis, and that we can reach out to each other with any additional thoughts and questions" (Seleznova, 2023d).

I recorded each interview via Zoom application and on my smartphone, to ensure safety from one of the recordings accidentally failing (following Ritchie, 1995). I used the Google Pinpoint application to produce primary transcriptions of the interviews and then edited them where needed to obtain precise transcriptions of my audio materials. Further, I printed out the transcripts and conducted handwritten data coding (following Löfgren, 2013) to figure out the main topics and patterns occurring in each interview. For each interview, I've written a short 1-3 page summary. As I was writing up, I used the coded transcripts and summaries while eventually re-listening to corresponding excerpts.

3.3. Additional poll

As I was already in my writing phase, conducting analysis for the chapter on the positions of those who left Ukraine due to the war and those who stayed, I realized I'm lacking data on the relations between the two groups. Obtaining such data in my interviews was tricky, as it was obvious to "those who stayed" that I'm the one who left; this could alter

the sincerity of their responses, my interviewees probably fearing to hurt me. My interviewing phase was already over at that moment, so to obtain additional data I considered conducting a small anonymous poll via a Google Form among my social media audiences — a rather diverse group of very different ages and backgrounds. I have received 38 responses, the data from the poll is outlined in Chapter 6.1; see Appendix 3 for the questionnaire I've used. Unfortunately, I've missed asking my respondents for more detailed data, such as gender and age; the only personal detail they were asked to point out was their current location: whether they lived in the same place as prior to 24.02.22, went abroad, got internally displaced to another Ukrainian city, migrated prior to the full-scale invasion, or other. I hope to continue studying this issue with a more well-planned research design.

3.4. Positionality

My positionality in this project is dictated by being myself a non-heterosexual Ukrainian woman, residing in Ukraine at the beginning of the full-scale invasion. This was both a perk and a certain downside. I'm obviously more of an insider to my respondents than any foreign scholar, even of Ukrainian origin, would be. At the same time, situating my research within a Western-derived knowledge system was difficult, as I constantly sensed both fear to "say something too bad about my country", especially while it's under attack — and to sound too "emotional", "personally involved", and thus "unconvincing" to my mostly foreign audience.

My "insiderness", however, wasn't complete; I was the one who left the country soon after the full-scale invasion started; due to my enrollment in CEU, my displacement experience wasn't as harsh as for some of my respondents who fled. So while conducting my research I tried to keep myself aware of my privileges, seeing the biggest risk of my position in oversimplifying and speculating on my respondents' experiences. To avoid this, I often asked my interviewees to "fill in details" (Weiss, 1994, 75) even if they assumed I had the same understanding of the issue we were discussing. I've also appeared, due to my cisgenderness, a complete outsider to transgender people's difficulties — and I'm grateful to my transgender and non-binary respondents for being open with me.

Although my initial plan was to leave my personal experiences out of my analysis in order to "maintain objectivity", while writing I've learned they actually can be as useful as my respondents', and I involve my personal perspectives a lot.

3.5. Ethical concerns

My primary concern was my respondents' and my own safety. For the sake of my respondents' anonymity and safety, I have omitted and replaced their personal data throughout my thesis; only pseudonyms are used, in a few cases — multiple; I have also changed the names of the cities where they were residing when it was possible without distorting their contexts, and the countries where some of them went. I've tried to make any changes as carefully as possible so that analytically important contexts would be preserved.

"Due to the nature of my topic, "handling difficult questions" (Weiss, 1994, 76) was an inevitable part of my interviews. What partially helped was showing my researcher's vulnerability (following Rooke, 2009) and acknowledging (with a short phrase) that I didn't always have readily formulated questions to proceed; I reminded my interviewees that they could refuse to answer any moment, and "checked-up" on their ability and willingness to continue. In such moments, I also tried to keep especially tight visual contact, and support my interviewees with nods and non-verbal "response tokens" (Gardner, 2001), such as "uh-huh", "mm", etc, so my interviewees didn't feel abandoned in any way" (Seleznova, 2023d).

Doing this research was emotionally demanding: I was encountering stories of pain and violence even more often than I expected, and my positionality underwent constant testing as I was discussing experiences at times way more harsh than my own. Nevertheless, it was also healing, reconnecting me with my community; I was lucky enough to discover I'm not alone in my fears, hopes, and bitterness. Receiving such an assertion wasn't a goal of my study — yet I want to acknowledge its value.

3.6. Limitations

The first, and significant limitation of my research was a time constraint, which made it impossible to conduct more detailed interviews or perform any longitudinal research. The instability posed by the war pushed me to act quickly; I had to adjust to my respondents' conditions, being ready that our interviews could anytime get rescheduled due to an air raid alarm or a blackout. I also realized the war could alter their narrations, setting the "limits of speakability" (after Plakhotnik, 2022) to their criticism towards the Ukrainian government.

As none of my respondents who went abroad due to war have lived in their new countries for more than a year at the moment of interviewing, obviously, their belonging to the new countries hasn't yet fully shaped itself, as it could in a few years from now; thus, the timing of my research itself posed a limitation.

Also due to time constraints, I wasn't focusing much on how specifically Russian propaganda was affecting both images of nationhood and sexuality within the breadth of Ukrainian society — although it is clear to me such studies are absolutely necessary, and I hope to make it an element of my further research.

My research somewhat lacked respondents from the Western regions of Ukraine, that haven't undergone such an intensive Russification as the Eastern and Southern ones. I couldn't include participants from currently occupied Ukrainian regions as well, as this would be too dangerous for them: people who live in occupied regions currently have to hide all signs of being queer as well as being pro-Ukrainian (Kasianczuk, 2023), and any accidental revealing of their participation in such research to the occupants could cost them health or even life.

Finally, I wasn't including "heteronormative" Ukrainians as interview respondents, even though it would provide a comparative perspective to my research. I plan, however, to include such an element in my further project.

Chapter 4. Outcomes of Russian coloniality for queer Ukrainian identity formation

Why the hell, Ukrainian? Talk to me in normal language!
(Someone whom otherwise I'd probably
be seeing for a couple more years, 2015)

Introduction

In this chapter, I will unfold my respondents' experiences of national and sexual identity construction within Soviet/Russian (post)coloniality. In doing so, I aim to engage with previous scholarly debates on sexuality and nationalism in Ukraine, and expand with a decolonial element the "intersection of nationalism and sexuality", proposed as an inquiry point by Olga Plakhotnik in their substantive studies of LGBTRIA+ Ukrainians' imaginaries of sexual citizenship (Plakhotnik, 2019, 45); I'm using Maria Lugones' (Lugones, 2010) framework on decoloniality for this task. In the last section, I will outline my respondents' experiences of Ukrainian national identity "solidifying" and eventually "repressing" their other identities.

4.1. Youth in a Southern sexual jungle: a personal vignette

My own experience of growing up within post-Soviet coloniality was illustrative enough. The 2000s South Ukrainian seaport city of Odesa was proud of itself being a "Russian-speaking" and "preserving" the "old" imperial "Odessa"[8] legacy together with a Soviet-born myth of a "sailormen city" (following Tanny, 2011; Dovgopolova, 2017). Ukrainian language, despite being learned at schools, on the streets was deemed "telyachyi", "of a calf" — to remind it's only uneducated "peasants", "*selyuki*"[9] who speak it (see Riabczuk, 2013). Ukrainian art seldom dared to brand itself as precisely Ukrainian, aiming for a wider "post-Soviet" audience; talented and ambitious Odesans flowed to Moscow and Saint-Petersburg in the first place to pursue their dreams (Martynchik and Palazhchenko, 2000). Those who tried pursuing Ukrainianness were too often marked "niche" and smoldered in obscurity.

[8] Until today, a never-ending part of my coloniality experience is trying to explain the difference between the Russian, "Odessa", and Ukrainian spelling of my city's name, "Odesa" — and why a single letter can matter that much, even my Google Doc trying to correct me while I'm writing.
[9] In the post-Soviet Ukraine, a lower-class rural person, close to American "redneck".

The 2000s Odesa also could be an all-Ukrainian embodiment of colonial sexuality. I recall a whole culture of "girls hunting a rich future husband": an "oligarch"[10], a foreigner, or at least a sailorman. "The Hunt" thrived in the nightclubs along the sealine, posh restaurants in the city center, and online dating agencies targeting Western bachelors[11]. It was never immediately clear who's the "prey" and who's the "predator" in this "sexual/marital jungle" — and it obviously had no space for "otherness": feminists and lesbians[12] were commonly deemed "losers" not qualifying for "The Hunt", no matter if they never wanted to take part.

It took me a decade of adult life to reevaluate my Odesan youth, short-circuited with inconsistencies between what I wanted to be, what I could be, and what my heterosexist environment insisted I should be regarding my sexuality and femininity. It took me even longer and harder to reevaluate becoming Ukrainian in a city where everything Ukrainian was deemed alien and second-class. Not long before the full-scale invasion outburst, I started sensing the common origin of these two experiences; as my research data shows, by no means is my case unique.

4.2. Growing up "post-colonial"

Asking people about growing up postcolonial, experiencing their first "awakenings" as Ukrainians, and developing their Ukrainian identities is very similar to asking people about growing up queer, with all of its going back, forth, and sideways in constructing one's identity, and difficulties of meeting "the tribe". Parallels between growing up Ukrainian and growing up queer in the post-Soviet Ukraine, the "smoothness" of both experiences largely relying on a random percentage of "allies" or "bullies" around, indicate both identities being a site of minoritization, despite Ukrainian identity being a "formal majority".

Erik, 50, a transmasculine nonbinary person, remembers growing up in Soviet Russia as an ethnic Ukrainian and Roma:

[10] "Marrying an oligarch" was a late 1990-2000s overall post-Soviet analogue of a female "American dream", widely pursued in popular culture and media, and centered around the images of the Russian oligarchy in the first place, such as depicted by writers Oksana Robski and Viktor Pelevin.

[11] One of them happened to be my first workplace in 2008, where I got a part-time "interpreter" job. However, what "interpreting" really meant was writing cover letters for the women "represented" by the agency, and mass-sending them to the overseas clients, hoping one or two out of 500 would respond and I will have an opportunity to conduct further correspondence on behalf of my client. I was paid 50 cents per reply from a man (who was charged 5 dollars to send it), and zero for the letters I was sending myself.

[12] Unfortunately, I don't have a lot to say about Odesan gay and trans-experiences of that time, yet I can suggest some of them — definitely, not everyone, — could be somewhat included in the "sexual jungle" imaginary — on very specific, Manalansanian terms (see Martin F. Manalansan on "Latino Chelsea bite" and New York "gay tourism", 2005).

> "At first, my identity was the following: I'm living in the Soviet Union, and I am a Soviet citizen. And as being a Russian is the most prestigious — well, I'm a Russian then. But something doesn't fit, as people around are calling me "khokhlushka" *[a female version of a Russian derogatory term for Ukrainians, "khokhol"]*. That's uncomfortable! Okay, then I'm calling myself a gypsy — that is exotic, too, but at least… In our circles, [being a "gypsy"] was more prestigious".

Overall, Erik describes attitudes towards Ukrainians in his birthplace Russian region as "benevolent xenophobia", based on "Meladze musicals"[13]. This caused Erik to reject his Ukrainian national identity — "living with it where I was born was, I would say, complicated". Later Erik's family moved to Crimea; in the 2000s, Erik went to study in Russia. Here, he mentions, for the first time he started feeling inauthentic as a Russian:

> "It felt like, okay, I'll try to stretch the Russian owl over my globe[14] — but it somehow didn't stretch up. I felt permanently untrue, like someone could uncover anytime that none of hell am I a Russian". At the same time, Eric felt like it was he who "was cheated": as he crossed the Russian-Ukrainian border, eventually coming back to Crimea from studies, he felt "this land was closer to him, despite what they said about Kyiv filled with Nazis wandering near Maidan… and there was something fundamental in a joke about a dog who was at least allowed to bark[15]. Something inside of me opposed the idea of being a Russian".

After graduation, Eric went back to Crimea. There he recalls visiting a rally in support of Viktor Yanukovych, soon-to-be Ukrainian president of an obviously pro-Russian orientation:

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[13] Early 2000s popular New Year's Eve music movies of Russian-Ukrainian co-production by Ukrainian-born Meladze brothers, based on novels by Mykola Gogol about the adventures of Ukrainian rural dwellers in the times of the Russian Empire. The musicals offered a grotesque, hypersexualized, deeply exoticized image of Ukrainians, generously spiced with cheerful and moving pop-songs in Russian and Ukrainian.

[14] "To stretch an owl over the globe" ["natyanut' sovu na globus"] is a popular phrase in the Russian language, meaning "attempting to do something difficult, barely doable, and at the same time useless" (Golub, 2020).

[15] "A dog runs to Russia from Ukraine, her eyes wide open. Why are you running, she's asked.

- Eh, nothing to eat here. I'm running to Russia.

Several days later, the dog runs back, her eyes open even wider.

- What's up this time?
- Eh, nothing to eat there either. But in Ukraine, I'm at least allowed to bark!"

(Moskovskiy Komsomolets, 2009)

> "I went to that rally, yes… But at some point, I found myself standing on the pier, watching the Russian flags and thinking: what's going on here? It's Ukrainian territory, no matter if due to Khrushchev's mistake, — why are there Russian flags? For a Russian party? No, guys, something is wrong. And why am I feeling so strange about it?".

The culmination came when Erik arrived in Kyiv for a short visit. He was talking with one of the locals in Russian when his interlocutor's phone rang: the man picked up the call and answered in Ukrainian. This was the first time Erik had ever heard the Ukrainian language "alive", not from TV presenters "who were probably forced to speak it". For Erik, this was an eye-opening experience:

> "Turns out, this identity, this language, is alive, it lives somewhere! Looks like I've been fuckin' cheated. What else was I cheated about then, what other parts of me did they want me to believe were bad? I felt like a teen sent to an LGBT "conversion therapy" camp, meeting someone alike for the first time — hey, so turns out there's a lot of us! And we are queers, not just some morons!". A week later Erik called to tell his mother he was moving to Kyiv; the next year, he exchanged Russian citizenship for Ukrainian[16].

Maryna, 26 years old lesbian coming from a small town in the North of Ukraine, recalls "being aware that she's Ukrainian ever since her [pre-Euromaidan] childhood — yet not having any "Ukrainian motifs" in her life due to this awareness"; they had, she recalls, a kind of "Soviet-Russian-Ukrainian culture". As she moved to Kharkiv, one of the biggest and largely Russified (Nesterenko, 2023) Ukrainian cities, nothing changed. Her university studies were held in Russian as well as her school education. The latter was massively reproducing Soviet narratives and rituals, like the collective singing of Soviet songs on the 9th of May, the Victory Day in the Great Patriotic War[17] — a core date for the Soviet narrative on the Soviet

[16] Back then, as Eric himself mentioned, it was a relatively unproblematic process. Since the 2014s onset of Russian aggression, it's been growingly problematic, right now thousands of long-term Ukrainian residents holding Russian citizenship stuck in ambiguity, unable to complete acquiring Ukrainian citizenship for years due to bureaucracy, and definitely not willing to be deported to Russia, where they would likely be prosecuted.
[17] A shortened version of WWII in Soviet-Russian historiography, excluding 1939-1941 period before Germany broke the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and attacked the Soviet Union.

populations' "common victory" over the fascism (Malinova, 2017). Such practices were common in the 2000s Ukrainian schools; the myth of the "Great Patriotic War" only started being questioned in the late 2000s - early 2010s, becoming widely disputed after the Euromaidan and the following onset of Russian aggression[18] (Chebotarova, 2020).

Maryna recalls gradually acquiring identification with Ukraineness through her trips over the country, exploring the "variations of Ukrainian, both in culture and everyday life". Coming to Kyiv and seeing its centuries-old Kyivan Rus' landmarks, she recalls, "became a 'booster dose', reminding where you come from, and how long this civilization has been here before. In Kharkiv, it's different: there are plenty of historical buildings there as well, but they are all built in the style of Russian classicism". She also emphasizes the importance of language for national identification: however, she mentions, the Russian language she spoke back in her hometown and Kharkiv, "wasn't about Russians; it was a different kind of Russian, with many Ukrainian and English words, and it was about the time when I was born and people I grew up with". Thus Maryna negotiates the consequences of russification, reclaims the language, and, in Jose Esteban Munoz's terms (Munoz, 1999), disidentifies with an image of monolingual Ukrainian.

Eric's eyes-opening identification with Ukraine through an improvised speech act and Maryna's through encountering "civilizational consistency" represented in cultural artifacts, can be compared to any of Munoz' or Weston's notions on queer identification through meeting someone alike and who's "been here before" (Munoz, 1999; Weston, 1995). What, at first sight, differs their experiences is that formally, neither Maryna nor Eric was supposed to be "a minoritarian subject" (Munoz, 1999) as a Ukrainian living in Ukraine (in the case of Eric — a white-skinned ethnic half-Ukrainian, who could be assumed much more likely to get minoritized as half-Roma — yet Roma identity appeared to be his shelter in younger age). Eric's experience can also clearly be read in Lugones' terms of decolonization through "learning about other resisters" and "recognizing the colonial difference" (Lugones, 2010, 753), overall his "queered Ukraininness" journey perhaps being the most indicative among my respondents', both due to age and living either in Russia or in the Ukrainian region perceived as "inherently Russian" (Charron, 2016) until quite full adulthood.

Constructing an identity amidst an overlap of hybrid discourses, symbols, and affects is, as Munoz rightfully mentioned, both a labor and a work (Munoz, 1999, 6). For some of my

[18] It would be fair to mention that "abandoning" the "common victory" remains one of the central Russian propaganda accusations against "post-Euromaidan" Ukraine, now deemed to be "following" German Nazis (see Mahaletskyi, 2020, for more details on the issue).

interlocutors, this work was done early by their schools and communities, where discourses over Ukrainianness were delivered in a conscious and, most importantly, engaging way — for example, through stories about "Ukrainian heroes" rather than "Ukrainian victims".

Nina, 25, from the South of Ukraine, recalls being excited with school stories about personalities who "helped preserve the Ukrainian nation and culture through all historical hardships". Dany, 23, had a whole "fandom" of 19th-century Ukrainian historical romances in their small Central Ukrainian town. Mark, 25, raised in one of the big "Russian-speaking" Southern cities, recalls accidentally watching a new music video by a popular Ukrainian singer Ruslana[19] when he was seven years old. Mark got so enchanted with the song that he insisted to be taken to a Ukrainian school[20] so that he could study in Ukrainian; luckily, the family showed nothing but amusement with an unexpected request and managed to fulfill it. The school appeared to be good, and while having a long and troubled journey toward acknowledging his sexuality, Mark never had to negotiate his Ukrainian identity, even when he found himself in less Ukrainian-friendly environments later in life.

Yet other respondents had to have their own journey of finding sense in their national belonging, an experience of an early and successful introduction to the Ukrainian language and culture commonly deemed as an unsystematic "luck".

> "I went to a Russian school, with only a couple of Ukrainian language and literature lessons a week[21]. I didn't like the teachers, I was bored learning this. I couldn't stand the history and literature, I couldn't relate this "legacy" to myself, it felt alien. I couldn't relate it to the country where I was living in either, they simply didn't match. Things started changing in 2014 when more Ukrainian content appeared. I started learning Ukrainian literature outside of the school program. That's when I could relate it to myself more; you realize that you have a culture, it's yours, and it can be interesting and beautiful. However, most of the interesting Ukrainian YouTube content is about the war, and I don't want to watch it — it makes me sad that there's nothing I can do with it".

[19] Known for winning 2004s Eurovision and actively using "authentic Ukrainian" Carpathian Hutsul motifs in her music and images.

[20] In the Soviet education system, networks of "national minority schools" were developed, where classes were held in the language of the minority, learning Russian, nevertheless, compulsory in most of them (Zamorskaya, 2018). Until 2020, some secondary schools in Ukraine maintained operating in Russian, using the remains of this system. In Mark's childhood in the 2000s, however, it was Ukrainian which was a "national minority", his parents having to choose between one of the very few Ukrainian schools in their city.

[21] Vasyl underlined later that nevertheless he speaks both Ukrainian and Russian freely.

Vasyl, 27, transman from the South of Ukraine

4.3. Growing up Queer

The hints on connections between coloniality and sexuality appeared to be although somewhat less spectacular than Eric's account on national identification, yet still omnipresent in my interviews. Some of my interviewees blamed Russian homophobic propaganda directly for shaping Ukrainian discourses around sexuality and ruining their family relationships: above-mentioned Olga, for example, found herself homeless at some point, as her grandmother, "soaked" with Russian propaganda, couldn't stand her transgenderness.

Maryna recalls her parents constantly watching Russian TV, herself being shocked several years ago by accidentally hearing a story from one of the channels about "a pedophile gay couple kidnapping a boy to take to America": it's no wonder, she mentions, her relations with the family members deteriorated as the latter were constantly consuming narratives like that. All in all, she expressed being surprised that "Ukrainian society wasn't even more homophobic, given the intensity of Russian propaganda". Here she echoes Nina who, when asked if her expectations from Euromaidan regarding changes for LGBT Ukrainians were fulfilled, responds that "the fact that a bill on prohibiting "homosexualist propaganda among the minors", similar to the one passed in Russia in 2013, luckily failed to be passed in Ukraine, speaks of a lot". Thus, an imaginary axis between "European values" and "russkiy mir" ("Russian world")[22] appears, where not only things could be better for Ukrainian queers, following the "European example" — but also they could be much worse, following Russia's.

Some others voiced bitterness about the Soviet past, which "left Ukrainians stuck in their prejudices, unwilling to learn something new", "communist ideology denying the notion of private life and being another" (echoing Rofel, 1999). A few of my respondents ascribed homophobia to harsh economic conditions — noticing, nevertheless, that "source deficiency" takes its origins from the Soviet era.

Few of my respondents, nevertheless, disapproved of the notion of Ukrainian homophobia being an effect of Russian or Soviet colonialism, seeing it as an independent failure of the Ukrainian government and society; among them some, like Olga, while mentioning the effect of the Russian propaganda on their personal lives, claimed more global

[22] A strictly patriarchal concept of supposed "reunification" of Slavic states under Russia's rule, largely centered around Orthodoxy, "Russian superethnos" (Wawrzonek, 2014, 762) and "defending heteronormative gender order". For more details see Wawrzonek, 2014.

notions of capitalist patriarchy to be accountable for heterosexism and homophobia in Ukrainian society same as any other in the world. This draws attention to the fact that like any other major societal issue, including those in postcolonial societies, the issue of homophobia in Ukraine is complex and requires a non-binaristic approach.

My observation on LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians commonly ascribing homophobia to be a part of the "Russian influence"/ "Soviet legacy" isn't the first of such a kind: several years ago, Olga Plakhotnik in their research on "Imaginaries of Sexual Citizenship in Post-Maidan Ukraine" obtained very similar data (Plakhotnik, 2019, 98-108). However, our approach to this data is slightly different. Plakhotnik uses obtained notions to develop a criticism against the "mainstream" Ukrainian LGBT-rights movement represented by NGOs, blaming them for producing nationalist anti-Russian and anti-Soviet discourses "aligning with the state right-wing rhetoric" (ibid, 104), Plakhotnik's work focused on epistemological decentering from "the West" rather than investigating possible Russian/Soviet colonial influences.

Ukraine's position in the European geopolitical hierarchy is for sure complicated; in the next chapters I'm dealing precisely with racialization and "intra-European othering" (Hudabiunigg, 2004) of Ukrainians in the EU and UK. I'd like, nevertheless, to notice the importance of my respondents' accounts when speaking about Russian coloniality. It is, of course, a researcher's decision on how to interpret them. Nevertheless, the observations of LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians sharing the experiences of Russian homophobic impacts on their lives are repeated over the years by different researchers. Simply dismissing such accounts as "euro-assimilationist" and "Western-centric" contains a risk of overlooking a serious issue; their repetitiveness points out a necessity of a more scaled analysis, which could create a wholesome picture of how exactly Russian colonialism influenced Ukrainian views on sexuality, and disentangle it with effects of Ukrainian nationalism "per se", religion, and other possible factors of influence.

4.4 Ukrainianness "repressing" queerness

My further research revealed it is rather a tendency for many of my interlocutors, especially those born closer to the 1991's dissolution of the USSR than to 2013's Euromaidan, to sense their national identity as something rather blended, unintelligible, in Anzaldua's words — "mestiza", born on the "bleeding border" of two unequally powerful worlds (Anzaldua, 1987). Yet for most of them, the 2022s Russian full-scale invasion became a trigger for national identity consolidation and eventually "repressing" other identities, such as queer one.

Rita, a transgender activist from Kyiv in her 40s, builds an imaginative space of levels and borderlines to describe how the full-scale war has "pushed her identity as a Ukrainian above all other identities", becoming a prioritized one. When asked why, in her opinion, this could happen, she stated the war made her "define", who's "the ours" (*nash, svij*) and who's "the Other", "stranger", *chuzhij*; "A line was drawn… and I had to situate myself on one of its sides". The "ours" according to Rita are all Ukrainians and, "in a broader sense, all who support Ukraine in this war".

As Rita underlines, her other identities didn't "fade" or "disappear": they're still present, just with the beginning of the full-scale invasion becoming less prioritized. Before, she was constituting her belonging through common experiences and goals as she was gradually acquiring her trans-identification and meeting, at first online, other transgender people and learning about their struggles and solutions, at times almost identical to Rita's own. Now it's a common experience and goal of physically and mentally surviving the war that unites her with other Ukrainians regardless of their gender identities.

Interestingly, the image of a borderline appears as well in Rita's narration of her national identity construction prior to 2022. Born and growing up in the late Soviet Union, she remembers discourses and "artifacts" of Ukrainianness appearing all around as the USSR dissolved when she was a teenager: some of her school teachers switched to teaching in Ukrainian; the whole History of Ukraine course changed, the teachers telling her class to "forget all they've learned before"; various items with national symbolic appeared on market. Back then, Rita remembers, she was mostly "watching from aside", finding these processes "interesting, but not related immediately to her life".

The first time Rita felt national events were directly affecting her was 2013's Euromaidan and the following onset of Russian aggression: she remembers "watching the events directly", and then comparing to how they were described by Russian media and popular discourses: "It was obvious for me, — she mentions, — on whose side the truth was". At first, Rita, like many other Ukrainians, tried to bring her truth to those of her numerous Russian acquaintances who were supporting their government's actions; she thought that "they were simply confused, and it would only take a detailed explanation to make them understand [what was really going on]" — a narrative otherwise frequent on combating homo- and transphobia. However, with every next ineffective try, Rita was feeling she was hitting a "blank wall": that, she recalls, was a moment when for the first time she sensed a "clear difference between Us and Them". Now with the full-scale war, Rita's only remaining option is "to choose her side" amidst this global division, and as she did so, the identity

stemming from her choice became prevalent, the "border" (after Anzaldua, 1987) no longer permeable.

Several of my respondents mentioned that prior to the full-scale invasion, they had rather a "global", cosmopolitan identification: "a person of the planet Earth", or "a person of the World". The full-scale invasion, however, narrowed their belonging to a country, the global "queer utopianism" (after Munoz, 2009) evidently no longer possible for them until their own country is being pushed to a dystopian existence. Eric, whose long and complicated journey towards his Ukrainian identification is described above, experienced his identities shifting once again due to the full-scale invasion:

> "I used to have three levels of self-identification. The first one was a narrow sense of belonging to the queer community, subculture communities, and Ukrainian sub-ethnicity — as I have plenty of ethnicities mixed, I accepted to a certain point each of them and sensed some representational duties. The next level was sensing myself as Ukrainian, and the third one was a person of the world, or maybe even world**s** — who knows, maybe we will go to Mars soon? I sensed myself as a being who at some certain point was born in this Universe, and belongs to it. [Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion] First of all, my "person of the world" identification fell off — how can I even think of the world, when my definite identity, in a definite country, is at war? ... As for micro-identifications, queer and everything else — they faded to the background as well, because — what is this all about, if I have *this one* identification actualized".

For Solomiia, one of my very few interlocutors originally from the "predominantly Ukrainian-speaking" West of the country, national identification hardly ever was a problem: not only she was naturally introduced to the Ukrainian language and culture since the very childhood, but also to understanding that there is a dangerous "Other", her older relatives always talking around that "It will be either a Pole or a Muscovite [Russian] who will attack us one day". What was problematic for Solomiia instead is identifying herself with Ukrainian LGBT communities which "appeared to be unaware and unprepared" when the Russian-Ukrainian war started its hybrid phase in 2014, Solomiia herself back then working as a journalist for an international news agency and tightly covering the events:

> "I understood that I was seeing what I was, and anyone who in principle gets the international situation should be understanding that since they [Russians] made it to Donbas, they wouldn't stop, they will proceed. I've lived through a whole spectrum of emotions back then, hoping that NATO would intervene and we'll finally enter it — which did not happen, — or that at least some big organizations, except for the volunteering ones … would speak up. But what did most of them, the mainstream ones, say instead? "Don't give Ukraine weapons, don't inflame the conflict!". Why did they say so? Because they were under the influence of both Russia and some from the US, for both of whom it [Ukraine's resistance] wasn't beneficial. But if only they had that national identity, they wouldn't speak like this. Some LGBTs were already fighting on the battlefields back then… They could ask [these soldiers], and understand the situation, and then they wouldn't have done these loud statements like everyone does. After that… Not like I started distrusting this community, but I have tried to be non-tangential since then. It's hard for me to identify with someone who doesn't get the situation like I do".

Nevertheless, despite disidentifying with the "mainstream" Ukrainian LGBT movement, Solomiia mentions very close ties with one of the queer-trans-inclusive feminist organizations, whom she describes as "her family"; the agenda of this organization could hardly ever be called nationalist, its head being a vocal anarcho-feminist. Solomiia joined some of their sex education projects — a path she later developed as one of her professional activities. She claimed, however, her involvement in this organization's activities to be "non-representational", as soon as "they were her family"; otherwise Solomiia stated she almost didn't maintain any connections with other LGBTQIA+ people, "preferring heterosexuals as friends, because they're simpler to deal with".

At the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion, Solomiia was preparing herself for a possible siege of Kyiv, where she resided for the last several years: she studied which Armed Forces unit she could join in such a case, and started delivering food and medicines to some of the already acting troops. That was when she mainly observed how the immediate proximity of the war "eliminates" all identities other than Ukrainian:

> "...Everything was very blurred, and in this blurriness, you don't take your identity into account anymore, you simply erase it, compared to the scale of the process you're involved in… As the war comes really close, it becomes a very much "here

> and now" process, and in this "here and now", the questions of identity and fighting for one's rights enter a new, life or death level. That is why people change: I know of some LGBT fighters who now say: 'it doesn't matter if I have this or this identity. I'm a soldier of this or that troop, that is what matters'".

Solomiia's observation, however, contradicts what one of my interlocutors mentioned, a 22-years old gay soldier and an LGBT activist in civilian life, named Misha. For him, the feeling of otherness derived from his gay identity hardly ever fades away:

> "A white crow will never fit a black crows' pack, you know. Here [in my troop] everyone knows about me, and everyone accepts me — I'm very glad and grateful for that. But it is still more comfortable for me to be around *my people.* That is why I'm now transferring to another troop where my boyfriend serves — there, at least, I will have someone whom I know for more than a year, someone with whom I have common topics to discuss".

Solomiia's definition of war as a "here and now process" basically quotes Jose Munoz's "heteronormative present" as opposed to queer utopian futurity (Munoz, 2009, 39) — and reminds of constant discourses around LGBTQIA+ Ukrainian rights issues as "untimely" (*"ne na chasi"*), observed by Alyona Zhuk (2016), Taya Gerasimova (2018), Tetyana Kasiyan (in Mel'nik, 2023), and other Ukrainian scholars and LGBTQIA+ activists over the last decade. These discourses suppose that while the country fights for survival, one shouldn't "pull focus" to own "otherness", this "otherness" apparently not being "useful" for the common fight.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the manifestations of Soviet/Russian coloniality encountered by my respondents while growing up queer in Ukraine, and how this coloniality connects with their national and sexual identities. Parallels occurring between "growing up Ukrainian" and "growing up queer", as well as some direct notions of how it influenced my respondents' self-comprehension, might indicate that at least at the time of my respondents' childhood and youth (mostly before 2013s Euromaidan), Ukrainian identity was minoritized in Ukraine, and required "special moments" and "luck of having allies around" in order to be acquired smoothly — much alike a queer identity, and atypical for a "majoritarian" identity it

was officially presumed to be. An important notion occurred as well of how Russian discourses influenced the livelihoods of my respondents through altering perceptions of sexuality in their immediate environments.

Finally, I have observed how in the wake of the full-scale Russian invasion a "solidifying" of Ukrainian national identity occurred in some of my respondents, belonging to this identity eventually "eclipsing" other identities that mattered before, like a queer one. I read this through Benedict Anderson's prism of "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983), with war and the discourses produced around it provoking discrete bordering between the "us" and "the other". If prior to the full-scale invasion this bordering could lie for some queers between them as queers and "heteronormative" people — now the borders have obviously shifted, Russian aggression being perceived as (and actually being) more likely to be encountered by and bearing more disruptive potential for a queer subject than a Ukrainian homophobes' hostility does.

Chapter 5. Western "gay imaginary" failing: racialization of Ukrainians in Europe

Introduction

In this chapter, I will outline briefly some of the difficulties my respondents are facing while fleeing from the war to Western Europe, and how its "gay imaginary" (following Weston, 1995) proves itself to be somewhat real in terms of queer inclusivity — yet fails as they appear minoritized as Ukrainians, similarly to Weston's racialized respondents of color.

This issue isn't central to my research, and I'm not going into much detail; the challenges of LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians' migration themselves are already being studied by more experienced scholars (see, for example, Maryna Shevtsova, 2023). However, I considered doing a short overview of my respondents' minoritization experience important to maintain the intersectionality framework of my research — and also to illustrate my argument on LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians being intersectionally (after Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) minoritized — in the EU, especially the Western Europe, more as Ukrainians than as LGBTQIA+ community members.

5.1 Displacement: trauma or opportunity?

"Nice to meet you… You know,
it's your privilege to be here".
(A wealthy, elderly German man upon meeting
my former colleague in Cologne, December 2022)

The majority of displaced Ukrainians are staying in Europe under the EU Temporary Protection Directive, currently in effect until March 2024. Mechanisms of possible Ukrainians' legalization in the EU afterward remain undetermined and produce a lot of anxiety in refugees — especially in my LGBTQIA+ interviewees, most of whom, despite all difficulties of forced migration and "European othering", do not see for themselves a perspective of going back to Ukraine soon, even after the war is over.

For them, "the European gay imaginary", initially approached simply for the sake of safety from Russian missiles, has proven itself to be real, on a legislative and representative level at minimum. Lilya, for example, recalled a "wow" feeling from seeing ads including LGBT people everywhere on the London streets, and from being registered by a tax service as a couple with her partner despite not yet being officially married — "it means we're *someone*

for them!". Maxim, a non-binary person, admits he's not ready to go back after "a year of living freely in the Netherlands" — a fight for LGBT rights in Ukraine, he's afraid, might take more than another decade, and after the war would likely be deemed untimely, *"ne na chasi"*, "rebuilding the country" to be prioritized. For Vasyl who's undergoing full transitioning in Spain, "there's simply no way back" to his native city, where he could run into someone from his family and "give them a heart attack" — besides "European tolerance", migration provides queer Ukrainians simply a distance from homophobic relatives and old surroundings (following, again, Weston's notion of "gay imaginary", 1995 and Gorman-Murray's notions of liberatory effects of queer migration, 2009). Among the other reasons to stay in Europe, my respondents name the better job and overall well-being opportunities; they assume that, coming back to Ukraine after a long "absence", they'll have to "start everything from scratch" the same way they had to when going abroad.

LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians willing to remain abroad permanently are mostly looking for long-term employment or education opportunities, assuming this would be enough to legally stay once the Temporary Protection is over — or, like one of my interviewees, start preparations to apply for asylum. The fact of not knowing when the war could be over pushes to do the same even those who, in principle, do not deny a possibility of going back to Ukraine at some point — on par with governmental aid being quite modest in most European countries, as of Autumn 2022 ranging from a monthly allowance of 56 euros for the single and unemployed in Hungary to 450 euros in Germany; only a few countries, such as Belgium and Switzerland, provide a slightly bigger allowance, up to cca. 1500 euros per family (source: VisitUkraine.today, 2022 a, b).

Undetermined conditions of staying push Ukrainians to "perform compliance", trying to constitute an image of a "good", adaptable refugee. Discourses of "quick adaptation", as some of my interviewees noticed, are widely circulating among European "locals", expecting Ukrainians to "use an opportunity" and "act quickly" despite any mental trauma. Roman recalls his hosting family in France "not understanding that people arrived there in a huge stress… They expected us to take our displacement as a "great opportunity", and race to build a career. In a McDonalds, yeah, what a great career to build!".

Yet job search has proven itself to be difficult for Ukrainian refugees — in Austria, for example, out of cca. 90000 displaced Ukrainians only 8000 were already employed as of March 2023 (Parliament of Austria, 2023), strict requirements for German language proficiency and tough recognition of Ukrainian qualifications becoming common obstacles to employment. Among my displaced respondents, a single person employed by profession and

not relying on any governmental aid was the one already working remotely in a foreign company in February 2022, with a salary big enough to keep living on it in Western Europe. All the rest were either part-time employed in manual jobs, "long-term" job-seeking / unemployed, or studying, like myself.

Another noticeable problem was finding accommodation; Serhiy, a young transgender man who went to Latvia noticed how all the streets were covered with Ukrainian flags upon his arrival — yet only a few locals were willing to rent their apartments to Ukrainian refugees who hadn't had permanent job contracts and were seen as financially unreliable by the landlords. Another my interlocutor, Roman[23], nearly became homeless when his hosting family in France considered they were uncomfortable with having Roman at their place, and the local LGBTQIA+ organization appeared to be "completely useless" while trying to help him find a new accommodation; eventually, Roman was settled in a room provided by the Red Cross.

At the same time, of course, not every LGBTQIA+ Ukrainian is willing to leave for a "European imaginary". Rita, a trans-activist, recalls how Western partners seemed only to be concerned with the difficulties transgender Ukrainians experienced crossing the borders in the spring of 2022: "They assumed we all just wanted to get out of here ASAP and didn't realize that despite all the difficulties we have, many of us are actually willing to stay and fight for our country". Nina, who spent the first months of the full-scale invasion almost every day negotiating with herself whether she should stay or go, once was asked by a Western European LGBTQIA+ organization if they could use her blog to fundraise for queer Ukrainian refugees:

> "We had a dispute over that, I told them it was illogical, to use the experience of the one staying to help those who fled. Like, look what horrors are happening there — now quickly drop some euros for those smart enough to leave, otherwise they'll have to go back and live a life of this lunatic!".

Thus, while those of my interviewees willing to stay in Ukraine are being "pushed" by their counterparts from abroad to leave for the "safe queer haven", largely reproducing European homonationalist (after Puar, 2007) discourses, those who've actually left find themselves far from being settled, frequently having to put on hold their professional

23 His story will be outlined in more details in Chapter 6.

identities for the sake of "staying safe" in Europe as Ukrainians and "staying free" — which also includes safety, in fact, — as queers. Many of them basically risk repeating the fates of queer migrants from the Global South who have to choose between professional opportunities and social status in the country of birth, and living more freely as queers in the Global North (see Acosta, 2008, Manalansan, 2006, Carillo, 2017, Adur, 2018)

5.2 "Small-talks" about disenfranchisement: a "new" manifestation of the "old" European racism

Oh, Ukraine! Is your house already gone?
(A friendly Viennese guy I
once talked to in April 2022)

As I have shown above, most of my respondents who fled the war abroad have faced difficulties common in principle for the "third country nationals" migrants in the EU — insecurity, struggling with finding proper employment and accommodation. Passing bureaucratic procedures while obtaining residence permits is currently somewhat easier for Ukrainians — yet temporarily of their legal status in the EU and unawareness of what might happen next produces plenty of anxieties.

At the same time, some very specific discursive interactions between Ukrainians and the EU "locals" occur frequently, not typical for other migrants to encounter. The most illustrative among them is a typical "small talk" about war experiences, frequently occurring between Ukrainians and "locals" who learn about their origins, an example from my own experience given in the epigraph to this section.

Vasyl, a young transman from the South of Ukraine with a bachelor's degree in sociology, fled the country soon after the invasion started. Initially, he went to Poland and worked in a cafeteria for several months, but later considered going to Spain: in Poland, he explained, "they already ousted the refugees". In Spain, nevertheless, it's hardly been easier: despite having a degree and speaking advanced English, Vasyl had to opt for an underpaid and physically demanding job in catering; he experiences difficulties getting access to hormone replacement therapy — and he suffers social isolation, as it's hard for him to connect both with other Ukrainians and with Spaniards.

Connecting with other Ukrainians is complicated for Vasyl due to his constant fear of his transgenderness being revealed: "If someone in the community finds out, I think I'll be in trouble. That's why I cannot discuss with them my desires and issues. They have their own

issues, and I have my own". Yet as Vasyl tries to establish a connection with some of the "locals", what happens most often is that his "Ukraineness" becomes a border the moment it's revealed, the European interlocutor now regulating themselves a desired extent of permeability to a minoritarian experience — most often, through and by a series of questions.

> "You tell a European you're a queer person, and no one asks a single stupid question a Ukrainian could ask, like "What's in your pants?" and "How do you make sex?". In these terms, they're respectful, everything's okay. But the moment they learn you're from Ukraine — they start asking a hundred million questions: "So how is your city? What do you think of Putin? Oh, and we always wondered, which language do Ukrainians speak?". I say my native language is Russian — they think I'm Russian and stop talking to me. No, I explain, I am a Russian-speaking Ukrainian — and they look at me with suspicion. In short, Ukrainians get under your skin when they learn you're trans — and Europeans do the same when they learn you're Ukrainian".

My other respondents recall the same experiences of being constantly asked all kinds of "anthropologist" questions by Europeans — and then, in Vasyl's words, "being let go". Another example of a scripted interaction came from Lilya, currently residing in the UK, from whom I'm borrowing the notion of small talk:

> "I'm very tired of people's reactions when they're kind of pitying me, yet I know in fact they do not care. I understand it's a part of their culture, these small talks about how bad Putin is; I understand they're used to having small talks when I am not [used to it]. Hearing that I'm from Ukraine, moved due to war, they're eager to express how sorry they are — but it gives me nothing. I would tell them more, but not when it is simply a small talk for them, conducted for the sake of politeness".

I myself have wondered many times when being asked if my parents in Ukraine are okay by some honestly random people — what would they do if I answered "no"? This would be, perhaps, a gross breakage of an already ritualized "small talk" script between a "sympathetic European" and a "good refugee", educated enough to speak the host's language, and polite enough (read — "almost white") to answer the questions of the kind a "sympathetic

European" hardly could imagine once being asked him- or herself. Engaging in such dialogues, I'm almost never sure to which point my interlocutor is willing to listen to what I have to say; do they really want to hear about my week-long road to Austria, and about how my parents deal with waking up to the sounds of explosions — or do they simply want to assure themselves that war is still somewhere far enough, the "bad things" such as war still happening just to "someone else", not them — and even these "bad things" are survivable since they're talking to someone visually fine. More than that, in fleeting minutes of such interactions, I seldom have time to reflect on how much I myself am willing to share[24].

I read these "small talks" as a specific manifestation of what Jose Munoz described as "chusma performance" (Munoz, 1999, 181-200). Analyzing American queers of color performative practices, Munoz takes the play by Carmelita Tropicana, "Chicas 2000", and its fragment on "Chusmatic Casino", to show how "minoritarian subjects" (in the play — "chusmas", monstrous and "tacky" queer Latinas) are being "pushed to perform" in order to entertain "the elites": in the "Casino", illegal gladiator fights are being held, for most "Chusmatown" dwellers the only possible source of income despite illegality (ibid).

Asking a Ukrainian refugee what they think of Putin, or stating one's own opinion of him, a European performs an act of involvement in what he or she sees as a historical event, a "dragging behind" post-Soviet country finally "catching up" to "rejoin Europe"[25], sacrificing thousands of lives on the way; he or she also performs reassertion of power order, seeing oneself entitled to interrogate and judge. The role of a Ukrainian here is limited to remaining an "acceptable", sanitized "Other" — unlike Munoz' "monstrous" *chusma*, a minoritarian Ukrainian subject is supposed to perform nothing but *dignity* (after Mosse, 1985) on the way to "Europeanness" and providing "right" answers ("they stop talking to me when they think I'm Russian").

[24] (TW: physical violence, mentioning of rape) This reminds me of another personal traumatic experience: back in 2010, someone tried to rob me. I was approaching home late in the evening, when a young woman stepped out from behind the corner, pushed me and tried to snatch away my bag. I was screaming and pulling it back until she gave up and walked away. Noone came to help me: however, the next day a middle-aged security guard from the local parking lot told me he had heard of the incident and asked if I wasn't "abused" — an euphemism for rape. A decade-plus later I still can't get it — even if I was, why on Earth did he think I'd be willing to discuss it with someone from the parking lot? I believe the whole situation is a pretty accurate equivalent to the power and boundary dynamics happening in the "small talks" described above.

[25] A comprehension of the purpose of Ukrainian defense against Russia, appearing not without the support of the Ukrainian government and public speakers widely utilizing this discourse for both internal and external audiences.

Conclusion

Although most of my displaced respondents noticed they felt more comfortable and respected as queer people in their new countries of residence, as Ukrainians they faced difficulties that put them way closer to the millions of the "Third World" disprivileged migrants of color than to any white queer "protected consumer-citizens" (Puar, 2007, 122). The ranking of their Ukrainian and LGBTQIA+ identities in their new environments often manifests through illustrative examples of "small talks", where their queer privacy is respected and unquestioned whereas their life experience as Ukrainians, people from a country at war, receives somewhat disproportionate attention. Their experience also shows that many people in Western Europe suggest that every (queer) Ukrainian by default wishes to settle in Europe, and the full-scale war is a good reason to do it "smoothly".

A contrast between "respect" towards a "queer private life" and "a push to perform Ukrainianness" clearly shows how Ukrainians are actually perceived as more "Other" due to their "not enough Europeanness" (after Tlostanova, 2012) and now victimization to Russian aggression, getting more minoritized than a queer subject in Europe: in short, racialized.

I would like to clarify that by no means my critique is aimed to diminish the support Ukrainians are actually getting. What I'm trying to show here is how European discourses over sexuality and race distort the comprehension of displacement. Forced migration cannot be a "privilege", even if the arrival point of such displacement is for whatever reason seen as "superior"[26].

[26] I am also well aware of criticism arising over Ukrainians apparently being perceived better than refugees of color from outside of Europe (see more in Reilly and Flinn, 2022; Beydoun, 2022; Ventouri and Vallianatou, 2022; Chakraborty, 2022), getting temporary residence permits and access to the labor market much faster than "regular" asylum seekers. Yet displacement cannot be "privileged", and although "surprising humanity" towards Ukrainians shows how policies towards refugees could and should be transformed, it shouldn't serve as an occasion to scapegoat Ukrainians for the governmental tactics and racism dynamics they had zero influence on, and to shift the focus from the reasons *why* people are getting displaced, from Ukraine or anywhere in the world.

Chapter 6. "Those who leave" vs. "those who stay": a new "cleavage" in the Ukrainian society?

Introduction

Soon after the full-scale Russian invasion started, provoking a flux of Ukrainians fleeing the war abroad, it became clear that one more "cleavage" is about to appear in the Ukrainian society in addition to those already existing, be they imaginary or real, — a cleavage between those who stay and those who leave. Unlike the other apparent "cleavages" — regional, language, political, etc (see Romanova and Podolian, 2018, on "the other cleavages"), this one appears in a matter of days and moments and permeates with estrangement even the closest relationships — friendly, familial, and those built on queer solidarity as well.

In this chapter, I will explore how this "cleavage" affects my respondents' perceptions of belonging, both in those who stayed and those who left. I'm also providing a cross-section of a wider public opinion on how belonging should or should not be affected by the physical situation of a Ukrainian, based on an anonymous poll I have conducted in the later stages of my research. The end goal of the chapter is to examine whether a new normativity centered around "staying vs. leaving" is arising in Ukrainian society, shaping a new site of exclusion (of those who left), how gendered it is[27], and how LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians negotiate their belonging amidst this normativity.

6.1 Preface: what societal opinion shows

Asking those of my respondents who stayed about their attitudes towards those who left was tricky: it was obvious that I was the one who left, too. Those of my respondents with whom the question arose, mostly my friends and acquaintances, assured me they were "happy for those who were outside of Ukraine, safe, and didn't have to share their terrifying experiences". Nevertheless, when they had to negotiate their impact in real-life situations, staying in Ukraine was perceived as an additional point of power[28], as well as a site of understanding and community:

[27] Given, first, the restrictions put on men to leave the country, and, second, widespread discourses of women *obliged* to leave with kids and "save the nation's future".

[28] I was rightfully asked in the late stages of my writing development if it was also a site of "trueness" in those of my respondents who stay — and I have to say exactly for my respondents it wasn't; none of them claimed in the interviews those who left are "less true Ukrainians". However, such claims sounded later in my anonymous poll, where people from a bigger variety of backgrounds and identities took part.

> "My boss left the country very soon after the full-scale invasion started… Later that year, when blackouts were already frequent and we were all a bit shredded, she demanded that we comply with a deadline. We asked, "Okay, maybe we can push this deadline a bit? It's cold and sad in our houses, so please let's not begin this". And she replied something like "What do you know, you're at home, and I'm abroad, it's difficult, but I'm not complaining!". I thought to myself: first, you do complain, second — are we competing in hardships? We're having a hard time with, you know, missiles flying around, and you — with people around talking a foreign language!".
>
> Nina

As in the late stages of my research I hadn't enough actual data on *why* the cleavage "leavers vs. stayers" is appearing, and how both sides explain and justify it to themselves, I have conducted a brief anonymous poll, attracting my social media audience — quite a diverse sample in terms of age and class — to vote. This poll helped me to gain some responses I couldn't have obtained in a personal interview.

Out of my 38 anonymous respondents, only 44% (n=17) stated that "The right to participate in inner decision-making, like, for example, voting on renaming of the streets" should be preserved for those Ukrainians who left unconditionally[29]. 31% (n=12) stated that such rights should be preserved for those who "plan to come back"; 21% (n=8) denied such rights. 18% (n=7) considered this question hard to answer (part of them coinciding with the "conditional" group).

23 out of my anonymous respondents were living in Ukraine at the moment of filling the poll, in the same place where they lived before the full-scale invasion (which means they weren't "internally displaced", being explicitly "those who stayed"). 82% out of this group (n=19) reported their attitudes towards those who left have somewhat changed, mostly in a negative direction — from a slight alienation and annoyance with some discrete acquaintances to an overt hostility towards the whole of those who left. The most frequent accusations justifying such changes were that those who left "don't care about Ukraine and about the war anymore…" and "aren't going to ever come back, used a chance to go for a better life in Europe". 47% of my poll respondents

[29] The unconditionality, however, in most responses based on the citizenship, and thus being in effect only as long as Ukrainian citizenship is preserved.

(n=18) stated that "it is important that Ukrainians would stay in Ukraine during the war": the most frequent explanation why was "to keep the economy running"; less frequent reasons included "to fight together" and "to show Western partners that there are still civilians to protect in Ukraine".

Narratives of regionality were very common in (non)justification of leaving: 57% (n=22) mentioned they perceive leaving the "near the frontline and thus more dangerous" regions as more justified[30]; leaving such regions was often stated not only as well justified, but as "desirable" or even "compulsory" in order to make things easier for the Armed Forces and offload infrastructure. Some respondents elaborated that going from the most damaged regions abroad instead of moving to another Ukrainian city is viable since the Ukrainian government cannot provide internally displaced people enough support. 18% (n=7) mentioned specifically that leaving Western regions is less justified for them. 23% (n=9) stated there are no more or less justified regions to leave. Gender narratives were also common[31]: in general, having children is seen as a very valid reason to go abroad, sometimes even obligatory, while leaving as a cisgender man liable to military service meets judgment.

The data shows that a certain division in Ukrainian society has occurred, and the sense of alienation between the two parties is real; it's not only my displaced respondents' "survivors guilt" (after Niederland, 1968) that produces their anxieties over not being accepted once they come back — a new, remarkably gendered normativity is being produced, centered around a physical location. The topic itself, I believe, is highly problematic and requires additional studying, with a more nuanced research design and methods.

6.2 Leaving vs. Staying: perspectives of those who left

My respondents staying abroad haven't escaped the above-mentioned anxieties and sense of guilt. Roman, a 43 years old transgender man who started transition already in his thirties, originally comes from one of the Central-Eastern industrial Ukrainian cities. He happened to already be abroad for several weeks on the 24th of February 2022, visiting a friend. As the full-scale invasion began, Roman considered not going back: he feared his

[30] Perceptions of what is "near the frontline" may vary — for some, it was the whole of East and South of the country; some specified these regions as "within the reach of Russian barrel artillery" (up to 50-70 km).
[31] Precise percentage of each statement not available due to the design of my poll and variability of discourses produced by respondents; I plan to continue studying the topic with more nuanced methods.

mental health, already complicated, wouldn't handle the war, and his precarity would get unbearable, given that for the last couple of years he had been working as a freelancer, and hadn't had any property in Ukraine.

Since then Roman has moved several times, and now tries to settle in France, where he is provided with social housing, an allowance, and also has a part-time job. Although he misses Ukraine and doesn't exclude the possibility of once going back, Roman believes that given his precariousness, he has more chances to have a *dignified* life if he settles in France, especially when he gets older. Roman senses a growing difference with his Ukrainian friends, who are staying in the country, some of them already fighting in the Armed Forces:

> "At some point, I've realized that people who stay are united by a common negative, tragic experience that I haven't got… A difference appeared between us. Roughly speaking, I am now more of a witness: I was told about what was going on, but I haven't had to survive it myself. Now there's something that divides us: not only a physical distance of me being something-hundreds kilometers away from Ukraine but also a psychological one. On the other hand, I now have new experiences that they don't have: socialization as a refugee".

Roman doesn't mention guilt haunting specifically queer Ukrainians with male primary socialization, like Maxim, 29, who realized he's rather non-binary already after moving to the Netherlands due to the war. Despite hating to be called "a man", for a long time Maxim identified with those who "shouldn't have left the country"[32], and felt profound shame and guilt. Getting together with other Ukrainian refugees was difficult for him: being among "mostly women with children", Maxim felt "very painful" to be read as a "man who left" even without them knowing he was queer. Thinking of these women's husbands staying in Ukraine, someone probably fighting, only added to his sense of guilt.

At the same time, in the Netherlands Maxim feels overall way more safe as a queer person, being able, for example, to ride a bus in a wig without concerns. Maxim plans to stay there, and wishes to obtain Dutch citizenship, so that he "could visit Ukraine freely whenever he wants with a Dutch passport", without fear of being "locked" inside again; thus he's longing to maintain connections with Ukraine in the future, and be able to visit places and people he loves, but step out of the male civic duty discourse.

[32] As I mentioned above, cisgender male aged 18 to 60 are legally prohibited to leave Ukraine since midnight 24.02.2022, with a few exceptions.

For Eric, whose previous life history was outlined in Chapter 1, it was staying in Ukraine that defined the authenticity of being Ukrainian: the "rational arguments" justifying his emigration, such as "belonging to Ukrainians cannot be revoked" and "I could bring more damage than use if I stay", the latter argument addressing Eric's mental health difficulties, never worked for him: an "emotional part" of believing that "once he has Ukrainian identification, he's obliged to physically stay", prevailed in his mind, causing severe anxiety as Eric and his partner actually left, first to Slovenia and then to Belgium. Alike Roman, my previous respondent, Eric realized that he and his partner, both in precarious employment and material conditions, with numerous health troubles, wouldn't handle living in their city if it was sieged or occupied.

Eric further describes his emotional being in a forced migration as a profound "sense of inauthenticity":

> "I was planning to migrate before, I was going to leave for a degree in a program... But when you leave at your own will, you take all of your identifications with you. Now it feels like something was cut off me, and sewn back in the wrong place. Like, how can I call myself a "true" [Ukrainian], when I haven't helped with all I could? This is what was cut off from me. Like I haven't helped someone close. How can I be called close to them afterward?".

When I asked Eric to draw me an image of a "true Ukrainian", he performed, full of undisguised irony, a very illustrative collection of mutually excluding discourses:

> "I have an image which is circulating in my bubble… Just as a "true man", "true woman", and all the rest of "true" identities, it is contradictory to the point of no return. Conventionally speaking, if a "true Ukrainian" stayed in the country — depending on *where* did they[33] stay, they're guilty. If they left — they're certainly, in principle, untrue. A true Ukrainian can only go abroad for some tours, to fundraise money on volunteers' needs. But then, they'll be poked for singing songs when they ought to be fighting. And if they go fighting, they'll be guilty again — because there are debates on which kinds of troops are more effective, and they'll appear to be in a less effective, of course…

[33] "They"is used here, in agreement with Eric on translation of his speech from our interview, as a gender-neutral singular pronoun.

> Well, if a person is abroad, this person has to have very-very valid reasons why. They're definitely going to come back to Ukraine, and they use time abroad as efficiently as possible — heal all the psychological traumas underway, or better, don't have any at all, put them away to explode after the war… They find a job in a moment, not necessarily by profession — that would be too much of a luxury, — but should work as much and hard as possible, earn a lot of money, and transfer them all to the Armed Forces…
>
> They likely cannot go back to Ukraine, because they have five children, their house was destroyed, and they don't want to burden the dwellers of Lviv[34] with their presence. Most likely it's actually *she*, a female Ukrainian, because if it's a man — he's either older than 60 and in poor health, or younger than 16 — in this case, he's already joined some Cyber Forces to terrorize Russians online. A "true Ukrainian" abroad speaks Ukrainian alone, no Russian, and also speaks the local language, either knew before or has learned it quickly. They behave extremely politely, follow the communal rules — no littering, no loud music, their behavior is European. At the same time, they're a little different: they wear a vyshyvanka, or a pin, to let everyone know they're Ukrainian and shouldn't be confused with the locals. Whenever they meet other Ukrainians, a "true Ukrainian" helps them — no matter if those others are "good", "bad", or simply went out for a walk".

Queer people fit this cartoonish image in an unexpected way: according to Eric, "nothing stops a queer from being a Ukrainian, both in Ukraine and abroad. Abroad it's even a benefit in terms of Europeanness [representation], as it shows that Ukraine isn't only inhabited by some conservative proper people — European people live there as well. Here, we have colored hair, we have other gender identities; more than that — look how good we are in fighting for our rights! We actually have this, and this, and this". Although in fact, Eric notices and his voice changes as he exits performative mode, "European queers already have a lot to learn from us".

[34] A city in the West of Ukraine, considered relatively safe due to distance from the frontline, where many internally displaced people from the Northern, Eastern and Southern regions landed — oftenly facing discrimination on rental market, rental prices comparable to Western European, and accusations of "being false Ukrainians" and "those who summoned the war".

Eric's explanation, which I read as nothing but a disidentification performance (after Munoz, 1999), depicts pretty accurately discourses around "true Ukraininness in the wartime" — heavily gendered ("it is most likely she, female Ukrainian"), demanding, barely possible for an embodied human being to fulfill.

Vasyl, who already notices estrangement from his friends who're staying, voices the following anxieties over the post-war future and exclusive hierarchies built around "the level of investment" in the common afterwar futurity:

> "[When the Temporary protection is over] they'll send all [unintegrated] Ukrainians back — and those [who were staying in Ukraine] will say "Hey, we here were actually saving the country, giving up the last piece of bread for the Army and weaving masking nets from dawn till dusk — and you were warm and fed *there in your Europe*" … So one will get stuck in between — unintegrated in Europe, scared away from Ukraine".

However, all above listed phenomena, with the anxieties, shame and guilt, didn't occur in every queer Ukrainian I've talked to: one of my respondents, Dmytro, 31, had so explicit non-identification with Ukraine, that he expressed nothing but gladness that he left. Dmytro is a cisgender gay man with an invisible hearing disability, coming from Luhansk and internally displaced since 2014. His life in Ukraine was so precarious, with numerous experiences of violence and official homelessness[35], and contrasts so harshly with his life in Germany, where Dmytro enjoys, in his own words, a way more inclusive environment, that an idea that he owes Ukraine anything at all — especially physical presence in times of increased danger, — doesn't seem to even cross his mind. Instead, the mere notion of going once back frightens Dmytro, evoking both memories of how the police pushed him away from an overcrowded evacuation train, seeing him as nothing but a young man perfectly fit for military service — and of passing medical commissions earlier in his childhood, where he had to pretend that he's almost unable to communicate and take care of himself in order to prove his disability.

[35] In Ukraine, residence address registration is compulsory, yet unlike, for example, Austria, landlords very seldomly agree to register their tenants. Thus those who rent apartments are most oftenly registered not where they actually live — for example, at their parents', even if in a different city. As Dmytro was coming from an occupied territory, and didn't manage to obtain an Internally Displaced Person ID, he was eventually registered at the local Homeless People's Center in one of the cities where he lived after 2014.

6.3 Staying vs. Leaving: perspectives of those who stayed

As my respondents were telling about what impacted their decision to be where they were, be it their home city in Ukraine, another Ukrainian city, or going abroad, a trope of negotiations occurred most often, both internal, with oneself, and external, with the others. Although in a variety of ways, most of the "justifications" for a decision to stay in Ukraine were evolving around different aspects of agency.

Rita recalls her decision to stay in Kyiv to be made first of all "intuitively", wishing to stay where she could be "a master to herself":

> "There was some sort of belief that in this or that way, we shall fight back and win… On the other hand, I feel that it is my home, and at home, as they say, even the walls are helping. I've always had this feeling, like — this is my home and I am a master to myself here, live the way I like and make my own rules. I'm always sticking to that. Later, I made for myself some more rational arguments why we shouldn't leave: we have pets[36], and our house is away from any strategic objects, so the risks are low… But, again, the first decision was intuitive".

Bella, 51, a transgender woman from the East of Ukraine, uses in a way similar, yet slightly wider spatial narrative when recalls her responses to friends insisting she should go abroad at the beginning of the full-scale invasion:

> "I said to them: I'm not going anywhere from my land: if this scum comes here, I will take a gun and protect myself. I have *nothing to do*[37] in Europe; this is my land! And I'm not going anywhere".

Interestingly, as Bella produces a spatial discourse of belonging ("this is my land!"), she switches almost immediately, through a comparison of Ukrainian and European prices, to notions of her agential connection with her community, remembering how she kept herself busy sending out medicaments to her friends who went abroad and faced inaccessibility of

[36] Although in the first months of the full-scale invasion the Schengen countries allowed Ukrainians entering with pets almost unrestrictedly, not asking for any usual documents and vaccination proofs, evacuating with pets still was excruciatingly hard for many due to lack of space in the evacuation trains and necessity to cross the border by feet in too many cases. Where leaving the city in any other way than by foot was no longer possible (for example where bridges were blown up around the Kyiv suburbs), many carried their pets on hands for as far as several dozen kilometers.

[37] Emphasis added.

hormonal therapy within local healthcare systems. Thus, in my interpretation, belonging to the nation and belonging to the transgender community unite for Bella at the point of her physical presence in Ukraine and ability to maintain her transgender network, now scattered all over Europe. She provided them care and support only a person staying in Ukraine could provide at that moment. Community-making activism was vital for Bella before, as she managed to create a network of trans-friendly healthcare professionals in her region soon after starting her own transition in her mid-forties.

Nina recalls her negotiations with herself in the following way:

> "You know, some people have boxes with memorabilia, different small things connected to a certain period of their life, or a person. Although I don't physically have such a box, for the first 3-4 months of the full-scale invasion every day I had to take it out in my mind and go through my "pro" and "contra" arguments, whether I should leave or stay. I received invitations, people offered me jobs and accommodation abroad. But actually, since the first week, I've realized I can be *useful here*... More useful than if I go abroad".

Further, Nina recalls how as a child she was impressed, learning Ukrainian history, how "Ukrainian people always managed to fight off these and those invaders… Thanks to people who did something great, so it got to the history textbooks. But there were also those who did something smaller and supported the whole movement". That is why, Nina explains, it is important for her to remain in Ukraine: "First, to stay in the context, and, second, to face all of the troubles together with my country and my people" — and do her own "small thing".

As Nina firmly considered staying she had, however, made several trips to the EU over the last year, where she was fundraising for LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians affected by the war and promoting further political support of Ukraine. Leaving Ukraine even for a couple of weeks turned out to be an excruciating experience for Nina, both on mental and somatic levels:

> "It sounds terrible, but I've gotten used… "Suspil'ne" [Ukrainian state broadcaster, also present online] notifies about explosions, but when you're at home, you hear them too, and you understand, more or less, where it happens — further from you, closer to you. You text several people, you all check up on each other, everyone's fine — and you understand something was hit, but not yours.

> And when you're abroad… I remember, there was this strike on a residential building in our region. It was at 2 AM, we were just cruising the streets of Prague in search of a working tobacco machine — somehow all of us ran out of cigarettes… I was scrolling the feed when I saw there was a hit in our region. Then they wrote it was a residential building, and I was immediately like: "Well, my house is gone". And then nobody doesn't report anything — for 20 minutes, 30, 40, nothing. Then they started reporting about the victims, rubbles… They only wrote the name of the town where it happened closer to the morning[38].
>
> I was very… Not worried, rather scared, all of this time. And not so much about my apartment — I was feeling guilty for it was happening somewhere *there* and I was *here*. What would I've done if I was there, too? Well, perhaps, I wouldn't go to that place at night to help clear the rubble. Although… Who knows, I'm a lunatic. I felt guilty for searching for cigarettes on European streets while people were dying under the rubbles".

Nina's body also reacted to leaving Ukraine: in one of her trips, as soon as the planned fundraising tasks were done and Nina had several days to rest, she immediately fell ill with covid for the first time ever and only recovered when the new tasks approached. Nina recalls her body was like using an occurred pause to simply "lie down and be silent" after several weeks of constant speaking to potential partners and donors in different languages. When Nina finally arrived back home and another air raid siren started sounding, she almost felt joy: "Oh, here you are, dear!".

Thus, what matters the most for Nina's belonging is, in my reading, the agential simultaneity of enduring the harsh "here and now" (after Munoz, 2009) of the war, a large part of its agenda built around heterosexist patriarchal narratives, together with "her people" — with a hope to once witness the "utopian" post-war "futurity" (after Munoz, 2009). The endurance of "here and now", however, doesn't come easy, neither to Nina nor to other my respondents. Being living embodied subjects, they report fear and tiredness from everyday

[38] This is a common reporting practice in the current war: journalists wait for several hours after the hit before disclosing more or less precise geographical details in order to prevent the enemy from conducting additional strikes.

tension, sounds of explosions, uncertainty, and grim news; Nina, particularly, is fighting a major depressive episode.

Conclusion

…Just as I was writing this chapter, I texted my mother that most probably I'm not coming to Odesa this summer: I admitted openly that I was afraid of drones and missiles, recently attacking my and other cities almost every night. My mother reacted calmly and told there's no need to overload myself with additional stress if I'm afraid. However, the whole dialogue, and even the way I'm reproducing it here, felt a lot like doing a sort of a coming out. Over more than a year of the full-scale war, I already have this bone feeling of a new normativity, produced through repetitive discourses and "performances" of staying and coming back (following Butler, 1990), a normativity of coming to Ukraine at the first possibility if not remaining there constantly. As long as my city keeps being liveable[39], refusing to visit it for fear of an accidental missile (read: for the sake of physical safety) feels like a deviation from this normativity — even if accepted and supported by close ones in a way "deviations" from heteronormativity are getting supported.

A new site of how a "true Ukrainian" should perform "proper citizenship" (following Mosse, 1985) emerges, very much similar to performing an unreachable hyperbolic image of "true woman" and "true man" described by Judith Butler in "Critically Queer" (Butler, 1993). Being physically present in Ukraine becomes one of the core demands for qualifying as a "good citizen", its strictness changing depending on the gender, region, and reproductive status of an individual. In the society, where LGBTQIA+ people were far from being always accepted before, and had to comply with specific "good gay citizen" discourses (Shevtsova, 2018), the current "absence" of those who fled can create grounds for additional othering; the "general public" not seeing LGBTQIA+ as those carrying reproductive duties might deepen this othering for them even more.

Making a decision to leave is commonly accompanied by rationalizations and justifications, most often lasting long after the moment of crossing the border. Justifications are usually built around why an individual could be more "useful" for Ukraine while staying abroad, or "could not be of use" while staying inside. It is also hard to escape for those who left entering an "ambassador mode", obliged to perform an image of a "proper, almost European" Ukrainian through their everyday life. At the same time, the "risky investment" of

[39] Luckily, and due to the enormous work of countless people both in the Armed Forces and in volunteership.

those who stay is seen as a valid reason to reestablish power relations with those escaping such risk[40] and assess the intentions and attitudes of those inside as somewhat more important. On an emotional level, those who left are still loved and welcomed, just like a memory of someone loved and lost would be despite physical absence — yet in the power hierarchy, their positions drop.

[40] One should keep in mind that not everyone currently stays in Ukraine voluntarily as the majority of legally male citizens are restricted from leaving. However, I believe such involuntariness might only sharpen the sense of injustice and at some point direct it against those who didn't have to suffer it.

Chapter 7. Spatiotemporality of queer belonging: enduring the "here and now" for the sake of queer utopian futurity

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to answer a question that was the first in driving the whole of my research: why do some LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians feel they strongly belong to the Ukrainian nation despite all the essentialist, often heterosexist discourses on what it means to be Ukrainian[41], circulating in the society even more severely since the beginning of the full-scale invasion — while others, in seemingly similar conditions, don't.

Over the course of my research, belonging has shown itself largely an agential and temporality phenomenon in my respondents: their affective senses of belonging were in a tight connection with their past experiences of being (un)able to invest agency in their surroundings and receive what would feel as a proper reward for them — be it recognition, money, or autonomic feeling of satisfaction; in Jose Munoz's framework I'm using — to perform queer world-making on the way to "queer utopian futurity" (Munoz, 2009). In this chapter, I'm exploring several examples of non-belonging in my respondents, caused by continuous disappointment and inability to fulfill dreamed futurities, and their consequences.

I also examine a discourse that has occurred in some of my interviews, of the Ukrainian "general public" (after Bersani, 1987) apparently no longer caring about sexualities and gender identities, united by common pain, fear, and grief. This discourse also appeared soon after the full-scale invasion started in some of the popular (see Feder, 2023) and scholarly discourses: for example, the US scholar of Ukrainian origin Vitaly Chernetsky, who employs Munoz's queer utopia framework to examine modern Ukrainian art, ended his recent lecture "My Own Private Ukraine" with the following statement:

[41] To give a sense of what these discourses sound like in their natural habitat, I'll cite the first paragraph of a 2018s blog post from a bus tickets retailer, by an anonymous writer, titled "What It Means to Be a True Ukrainian" and having over 50,000 views:

"To be a Ukrainian means… to live among the most beautiful women in the world! This statement is a universally recognised global fact. Millions of foreigners admire the beauty of the belle half of our country and consider it an honor to marry a Ukrainian woman. But, in addition to the aesthetic side of the issue, many also emphasize that Ukrainian women are very hardworking, kind, sensitive and devoted wives. Who would object to having a real hostess in the house, who puts her heart and soul into creating warmth and comfort? … The thirteen heroic deeds that Hercules tried to cope with for so long, a Ukrainian woman can perform in one day, and even more — make them her usual duty".

(InBus.ua, 2018)

> "Since February 24th, Ukrainian society has changed enormously in terms of its acceptance and support of the queer community. Queer people serve openly in the armed forces, many of them have this Unicorns[42] patch as identification… It doesn't necessarily mean that there are no problems — there have been issues with transpeople[43]… But these are growing pains, and what we see on the general level, the tendency, the trend in how far Ukrainian society has come in eleven months in terms of integrating, supporting, and being proud of its queer community, is really remarkable".
>
> (Chernetsky, 2023)

Although when the full-scale invasion began I had the same utopian expectations, further in this chapter I share my findings which prove the contrary, and show that for LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians queer utopia still remains "a horizon" (Munoz, 2009, 32).

7.1 Non-belonging: cumulation of disappointment

It is hardly possible to fit the whole complexity of non-belongings of Ukrainian queers in the scope of a chapter section. However, over the course of my research, I have observed a few tendencies connected to spatiotemporality which can be further unfolded.

First of all, the sense of non-belonging was strongly connected with repeated disappointments, which can also be read as unfulfilled futurities. Dmytro, whose story I've started unfolding in Chapter 6.2, recalls how he went to Lviv, the largest city in the West of Ukraine, soon after his home city fell under the "Luhansk People's Republic" occupation in 2014. He had some doubts, as he had friends in Kyiv, and his family considered staying in Luhansk; however, Dmytro wanted "something more extreme… And at the same time, to see a convincingly Ukrainian-speaking space".

Back in 2014, Lviv was really a place where the one wishing to speak Ukrainian in everyday life had way greater chances to have a matching environment than in any other Ukrainian city with a population of 1 mln or bigger. Nevertheless, Dmytro's imaginary of Lviv wasn't limited only to the language of everyday communication. He expected it to be more liberal, people to be "more responsible, enlightened, and rational" — Dmytro rejects, however, to use the notion of "Europeanness" for his imaginary. 2014 was not only the time

[42] A symbol of the Ukrainian LGBT soldiers, created in 2021 (Kodzhushko, 2021).
[43] Chernetsky here means that many transgender people experience difficulties crossing the border as legally male Ukrainians are restricted to leave the country since the full-scale invasion onset.

of the Russian aggression against Ukraine onset; it was also an immediately post-Euromaidan time, filled with fresh and high revolutionary hopes. Dmytro was no exception: infuriated by the invasion of Crimea and Donbas, he had at that time "a very deep belief in Ukraine", and felt an urge to "do something to create the Ukraine he imagined for himself" — more humane and inclusive.

The reality, however, didn't turn out to be favorable to Dmytro's aspirations: for several years he had to "loiter a lot", working in a fast-food chain and struggling to obtain Ukrainian language proficiency enough to fulfill a dream of becoming a journalist. At some point, Dmytro tried to pursue a university education — once again, since his previous attempts failed due to the universities' inability to adjust the educational process to Dmytro's hearing disability. A university in Lviv, despite expectations and a "progressive" reputation, suffered the same flaws. Finally, the local LGBT community, despite having a local LGBT organization, was mostly existing "underground". Like in any other city or place, this "undergroudness" not only limited possibilities of representation, but also increased the vulnerability of the less powerful community members, Dmytro himself several times became a target of sexual assault and harassment, and received zero protection and support from others. He was explicitly othered through his Donbas origins[44]: whenever people liked him, Dmytro recalls, they readily perceived him as a "true Halician"[45], but as long as something went wrong, he was "immediately reminded" of his "dubious origin".

After several years of struggling, Dmytro considered moving again, now eastwards, to Dnipro city, where he resided until the full-scale invasion started. Here Dmytro found more opportunities to engage in LGBT activism, taking part in nationwide events and hosting online talks. However, at the moment of his relocation, he "didn't believe anymore he still wanted to do something for Ukraine".

Soon after the onset of the full-scale invasion, Dmytro went abroad, his multiple-day experience of trying to cross the border as a cisman with an invisible disability only adding to his traumatic memories "collection" of humiliation and injustice faced from the authorities. After several weeks at his friends' in Romania, Dmytro went further to Germany, ending up

[44] Not an uncommon case for the Ukrainian society; I can still recall how in 2014-2016 most rental announcements contained a note whether people from Donetsk and Luhansk regions are considered as tenants or not. Being an internally displaced person in Ukraine since 2014 was a common site of othering, and although I didn't have enough space and scope to examine it in the current work, it is absolutely worth pursuing further.
[45] After Halicia *(Halychyna)* a region in the West of Ukraine, predominantly Ukrainian-speaking and often perceived as a "cradle" of Ukrainian national identity (see Magosci, 2002).

in one of the biggest cities. He speaks German fluently and now studies again. Overall, Dmytro feels in Germany more comfortable than ever:

> "For the first time, I've found myself amidst such a diversity… And I know for sure I'm not the freakiest one here… When I arrived here, I didn't realize right away that, for the first time in my life, I'm in a country where I could marry… I'm moving very gradually towards being more open and getting rid of restrictions. Just yesterday I noticed how I kissed my boyfriend almost effortlessly on the train. That was incredible — I remember very well how even an attempt to hold my boyfriend's hand back in Ukraine felt like a burn".

Dmytro avoids any national identification, being equally annoyed when someone tries to "brand" him as "Russian" through ethnicity or "Ukrainian" through nationality and prefers to call himself "a person of mixed origins with Ukrainian citizenship". He blames Ukraine, both its authorities and the society itself, for failing to protect the vulnerable and to "cope" with its old problems, such as language ambiguity: Dmytro's dream was once to establish a bilingual news outlet, with a Ukrainian-speaking editorial board in Lviv and Russian-speaking in Donetsk. This dream no longer looks fulfillable, and Dmytro feels like he was urged to "cut off" his memories and attachments of Russian-speaking childhood.

While helping other Ukrainian refugees, including his own family who eventually considered joining him in Germany, Dmytro does not identify with them as well: "I try to help them, yes… But I cannot say "us" about me and them". He reports being repulsed by xenophobia and narrow-mindedness common in this community, and shocked with how temporary dwellers of the shelters for Ukrainians instead of supporting each other are trying to establish power and "authenticity" hierarchies, figuring out who had "better reasons to leave Ukraine". Dmytro believes "flexibility and openness to the world which can be different" is what distinguishes him among the majority of Ukrainians.

> "The most terrible, the most hideous things about people from Ukraine are actually told by people from Ukraine themselves. They interpret things in a very specific manner. I understand it's stipulated by a great deal of stress, it's true… But sometimes it reminds me of this Soviet thing, like "we are in a castle, the whole world's against us, and nothing but an Iron Curtain is going to protect us".

Sometimes it's just unbearable, and it's one more reason to avoid talking to these people".

This narrative, repeated in several other of my interviews, can be read as temporal, mirroring Kulpa and Miezelinska's observations on differences in queer temporality narratives between Western and Eastern Europe, where "post-Soviet" / "post-socialist" Eastern Europe is commonly seen as "dragging behind and needing to catch up" (Kulpa and Miezelinska, 2011).

The case of Dmytro is an illustrative example of multiple intersectional minoritization: an internally displaced, working-class gay person with a disability, also minoritized as a primarily Russian speaker while living in Lviv, and as a cisgender man while trying to cross the border and escape the war. In my other respondents' stories, some less obvious sites of minoritization and inequality came up, also intersectional. Maxim, for example, explained his unwillingness to go back to Ukraine from the Netherlands with a fear that "fighting for LGBT rights might take more than another decade". However, he immediately proceeded to another topic: as a soloist in one of the big Ukrainian state theaters, he was extremely low-paid, earning cca. 6000 hryvnia per month, roughly equivalent to 200 euros[46]. When the full-scale invasion started, his salary was at first cut by 30%, and the administration demanded that Maxim be present in the city if he wanted to be paid. Maxim has sacrificed his queer openness to this career, becoming fully closeted after joining the theater — yet this sacrifice was hardly ever "rewarded" on any level. Thus, the authorities' inefficiency in specifically protecting LGBT people, for sure, was noticeable for Maxim, who faced anti-queer harassment and the police's indifference as he was younger. But being systematically underappreciated as a cultural worker added as well to his disappointment.

As Dmytro's and Maxim's disappointments cumulated, propelled by experiences of violence and diminishing, both eventually replaced the locus of their "utopian futurities" outside of Ukraine. While Dmytro almost completely abstained from identification with Ukraine, Maxim preserves a keen identification with its culture and his own Ukrainian roots — being ethnically a half-Russian, he "never questioned if he's a Ukrainian or not". However, Maxim prefers to direct his further, as I call it, agential investment in his new life in the

[46] At that time, an average salary in Ukraine, according to the State Statistics Service, was cca. 17,500 hryvnias, equivalent to roughly 560 euros. Workers in IT and financial spheres received around 1000 euros per month on average (Ekonomichna Pravda, 2022). An average price for renting a one-bedroom apartment ranged, depending on the region, from 2200 hryvnias (70 euros) in Sumy region to 8500 hryvnias (275 euros) in Kyiv (State Statistics Service, in "Slovo i Dilo" outlet, 2022)

Netherlands, where he sees his own queer utopia as much closer to fulfillment, and takes a somewhat "ghostly" (after Munoz, 2009) position towards Ukraine: not breaking the ties completely, but also not being agentially present to it both in spatial and temporal senses.

In several interviews, notions of earlier childhood and teenage bullying experiences came up as factors causing a sense of non-belonging. Not all of them were related to sexuality and gender expression: Roman, for example, was bullied for being half-Jewish. Nevertheless, as previous research shows, bullying in formative years regardless of grounds can constitute a person's lasting feeling of being "out of place", social isolation, and difficulties in building attachments (see Rigby, 2003; Wolke and Lereya, 2015). These notions can also be read through a prism of unfulfilled futurities, essential childhood queerness[47] (following Halberstam, 2011) for the first time encountering pressure of normativity, in schools this normativity is often institutionalized and amplified by the size of the group.

In another case, of a young non-binary person Dany, a school experience of bullying resulted in a splitting of attachment: he loves tenderly Ukrainian culture — art, literature, language, and old ethnic traditions, — yet notices he doesn't have any attachments to his childhood town, where he was bullied for non-heterosexuality: "I don't enjoy staying there… We've all grown up a bit since then, but memories remain". Being attached to symbolic, out-of-time artifacts and images of Ukrainianness produced for a wider audience is more viable for Dany than preserving attachment to a place bound with painful memories.

Surely, my other respondents faced numerous disappointments as well — yet some of them, although disidentifying with their national identity, preserve their "futurity focus" in Ukraine, like Olga. Olga, a young transgender woman from Kharkiv, who has already experienced alienation from family and the following homelessness, does not have any nationalist attitudes; she has always seen herself rather as a "person of the post-Soviet space", growing up "surrounded by the same panel houses as in her grandmother's native Siberian city", and she doesn't understand "how can post-Soviet populations be really divided":

However, Olga realizes herself as "a part of the nation which is now fighting off the Russian aggression" — and she wishes to stay further in Ukraine to pursue activism and "try to make it a better place", even though she disapproves of many of the state politics and current societal attitudes. Thus, Olga disidentifies (after Munoz, 1999) with Ukrainian societal

[47] Jack Halberstam in their 2011's book "The Queer Art of Failure" argued that childhood is essentially "queer time and space", when conventional norms and gender performances are often being disrupted (Halberstam, 2011).

mainstream, and endures to pursue her own "utopia" (after Munoz, 2009) tied to Ukrainian locus and her queerness, but not to nationality.

For others, like Rita, the utopia is both queer *and* Ukrainian, the ability to disidentify from heterosexist mainstream politics preserving their national identities from disintegration; Rita argues that Ukrainian queers should once organize their own "LGBT-Maidan" (revolution), and suggests it can happen once LGBTQIA+ soldiers come back from the battlefields after the war is over, and "don't wish to tolerate the lawlessness anymore". She thus disidentifies with the image of the Euromaidan revolution as a "majority" revolution, which failed to fulfill many of its expectations on behalf of the queer community, and suggests a reenactment of one of the biggest contemporary Ukrainian symbolic events for the sake of queer liberation.

For some of my respondents, Russian aggression became an actual trigger to transfer their futurity locus from a "European imaginary" abroad to Ukraine. Misha, 22, from a middle-sized Western Ukrainian city, when I asked about how people around him were talking about what it means to be Ukrainian as he was a child, assured me that "there's no need to go back this far — just look at what was going on prior to the 24th of February [2022]". The majority of people around, he admits, including himself, were talking about how "there were no opportunities in Ukraine" and how they wished to "escape abroad", listing corruption, unemployment, and high prices as the main reasons. The war, however, changed his perception completely:

> "Only when the [full-scale] war began, I started shaping that in my consciousness… That, come on, this is my country, what "abroad" are you talking of? I'm only going abroad for a vacation, nothing else. I've started to realize that *there is a lot to do here*[48]. If people would unite and start doing something together, everything could be wonderful".

Misha now fights in the Armed Forces. He is a keen promoter of civil partnerships legalization, and has recently engaged with his partner; as soon as the war is over, Misha dreams to open "the biggest gay club in Kyiv".

[48] Emphasis added.

7.2 Queerness embedding itself to Ukraineness?

> "As soon as the war is over, one of the first changes in Ukraine should become same-sex marriage legalization. Ukrainians of all orientations and gender identities are now fighting the enemy on all fronts and passing a way more complicated citizenship test than simply paying taxes and not littering. Couples of any composition realize the value of their relationships and propose to each other in shelters, under firings, on combat positions... Everyone with no exception deserves a non-compromise "happily ever after". After all, we have a war not simply for a piece of territory with mineral deposits or for currency exchange rate — we have a war for freedom to be ourselves and live on our land in dignity".

I wrote this post on my Facebook four days after the full-scale invasion started, inspired by the news of a good fellow of mine, art historian Oksana Semenik engaging with her boyfriend while hiding in a basement in Bucha[49]. On the fourth day of living in an overturned reality, where every next hour felt like a month, the end of the war seemed to be a matter of a few weeks — and after that, it seemed, "everything will finally be clear", and the society gone through a palingenetic transformation[50] will never be the same. Back then I could hardly imagine that a year later the war would still be going on, and I would casually perform another facepalm while reading news on Ukrainian government committees opposing the bill on civil partnerships, and homophobic comments under such news.

Similar hopes sounded frequently in my interviews. For most, they were only a project for the after-war future; for a few, it was already a perceived reality that sexual orientation and gender identity "doesn't matter that much" in Ukrainian society anymore, expressions of homo- and transphobia to be seen as signs of being "mentally close to Russia". 19 years old Lugan'[51], for example, mentions the following:

[49] A Kyiv agglomeration town which was occupied by Russians from 27.02.2022 till 31.03.2022; the events of this period widely covered in press as "Bucha massacre", Russian occupants performing mass killings and rapes of civilian Ukrainians along with looting and vandalizing their homes; in an investigation performed by Ukrainian authorities after the town was liberated at least 458 people were reported murdered during the occupation period.

[50] After Ukrainian philosopher Volodymyr Yermolenko who develops a theory that palingenesis after major societal disruptions, such as the French Revolution, is the main moving force for the modernity societies construction, including Ukrainian (Yermolenko, 2018).

[51] A pseudonym derived from the name of the river in his native city, Luhansk, under occupation of "LNR" Russian-backed separatist republic since 2014.

> "...because of the full-scale invasion, with all the stress and emotions they've had to go through, people generally started to care less about each other's differences, and tolerance towards LGBT-community increased — no matter how different you are; if you can help, your help will be gladly accepted".

Nina, who volunteers for the local queer community, supplying aid for those displaced and unemployed, discovered at some point she wasn't afraid anymore to get fired because of her sexual orientation somehow getting disclosed at her job: "That would be ridiculous, I understand it now. If they fire someone who manages *what I manage*, it would only be worse for them".

Solomiia, who elaborated on Ukrainian identity "eclipsing" the queer one (see Chapter 4.4), went on to describe how now "when a person discloses their queer identity to others — people are now much calmer about it". She recalls a commander of one of the troops for which Solomiia was volunteering, who was utterly surprised when one of his fighters, a closeted transman, already after three months of fighting finally took the courage to request hygienic pads for his menstruations — "Why didn't he tell me earlier? He needs it — we get it, none of a question". Solomiia's narrative states how both queer and heteronormative people started — yet in very specific situations — to care less about following the "normative protocols" in the wake of the common danger of being murdered as Ukrainians. In Solomiia's own words, "common vulnerability equates". She further brought up an even more illustrative example, a case hardly imaginable several years ago:

> "I was delivering goods to that Territorial Defense [*teroborona*] troop for quite a while, I knew personally some guys from there… So I was bringing them heated food, meds — and once that guy came up, all covered with Nazi tattoos, he wanted some meds from my bag. And then he began saying things about LGBT-community — my guys were throwing terrified glances at both of us, like, "You've started it really wrong, man"... Well, I explained to him that, first, I can stop bringing goods he needs, I could be not doing it from the start, and he's not in a position to be a bully. Second, if he dislikes LGBT so much, he can fuckin' cross the border with Belarus' and go to Russia. But he'd be probably beaten there to death very soon because he's a Nazi — same as I would be as a queer, so we're in a somewhat equal position, and what's even the sense of yelling at each other? He

behaved pretty normally ever since then. Probably, my guys also explained to him a few things after I left".

It draws attention to how despite the generality of Solomiia and Lugan's notions of overall "indulgence for queerness", in real-life examples it mostly comes up in connection with LGBTQIA+ in the Armed Forces, or at least those actively involved in fundraising and volunteering. It is still hard to imagine a "full-scale" tolerance and inclusivity towards all of the queer Ukrainian population including the majority staying "at the rear" and "not being helpful". The discourse of a compulsory proactive and societally useful "good gay citizen" described by Maryna Shevtsova several years ago, in her body of argument used by activists as a strategy to fight homophobia (Shevtsova, 2018), thus, persists. In fact, even public discussions around LGBTQIA+ soldiers are still often permeated with distrust and disapproval: only recently, for example, the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense denied support to a bill on civil partnerships, which is widely pursued as designed to protect the LGBTQIA+ fighters first of all: the Ministry claimed that "there is no actual data about thousands of LGBT soldiers fighting for Ukraine" (Reznikov, 2023).

So the above-mentioned phenomenon of "people not caring about gender and sexual identities" depicts rather subjective perceptions than an objective reality. Not everyone shares these perceptions, too: Dany, for example, stated that "homophobia and misogyny, in fact, never went away from Ukraine, and saying how everyone unites because of the war is a hypocrisy".

Nina's dreamt futurity is definitely built around queer inclusion, differences on the ground of gender and sexuality replaced by the community, memorizing the common fight, and mutual healing:

> "I hope that after the war all of us Ukrainians will cherish our victory for a very long time, and always remember… how scary and painful it was — but nevertheless, we've done it: together with that freaky guy with painted nails, and with that woman that we don't like, and with those dudes with not funny jokes. But after all, we've done it all together, and we should preserve our memory to never let it happen again".

However, in the current moment, despite feeling more secure as a lesbian in her personal surroundings after "all the things she managed", Nina noticed how the advocacy of

civil partnerships for the sake of "protecting LGBT-soldiers rights" almost never mentions lesbian volunteers who risk their lives traveling to frontlines, or who can be killed with a missile relatively far from the battlefields. Nina confirmed that, overall, the war creates additional pressure on LGBTQIA+ people, making them constantly "additionally prove their value for the society".

Not everyone in principle shares even this deal of optimism regarding the "queer future of Ukraine". Serhiy, a trans-activist who's currently in Latvia, expresses concerns that after the war "everyone will be busy with rebuilding the country", and LGBTQIA+ rights will be pushed aside — similar notions sounded in several other interviews. The best time to advocate LGBTQIA+ rights, according to Serhiy, is now, when the queer community's participation in the fight for Ukraine can be used as leverage together with increased attention to Ukraine from the EU. However, he mentions, advocacy is also more complicated now as many activists of the Ukrainian LGBTQIA+ movement went abroad, joined the Armed Forces, or simply no longer have resources to continue their activism, experiencing burnout and overall exhaustion due to the war.

Another big concern is of the post-war societal trauma, manifesting itself in growing disagreements and aggression outbursts — especially given that it isn't clear whether the health care system will be able by that time to provide adequate psychological support for all the combatants, something that clearly doesn't happen now (Gor, 2022). Alex, who's been in gay activism for more than a decade, stated that he wouldn't like to migrate anywhere now, but he thinks of migrating at least temporarily after the war is over and "those homophobic right-wingers, many of whom went to the war, come back", fearing the number of attacks against LGBTQIA+ people might increase sharply in that period.

Not everyone finds it easy to think of any future at all as the war is ongoing: Lugan', who fled from Luhansk in 2014 as a child with his parents, and had to flee from a Kyiv suburb once again in 2022, states it's simply difficult to look further in the future for him, as he's got used to "never knowing if tomorrow even comes". I assume it can become true for more young people since the war now affects the whole Ukrainian population, including children.

Conclusion

Narrations of belonging and non-belonging in my respondents were deeply tied to their perceived loci of applied agency, which can also be, following Munoz's framework on "queer utopia", seen as the "utopian futurity" loci. These loci are shifting within a complexity

of my respondents' experiences of power and powerlessness, dignity and humiliation; increased external pressure, such as the onset of the Russian full-scale invasion, can cause some of them to replace their locus.

Non-identification with other Ukrainians also appears to be a temporal phenomenon: whereas some of my respondents feel "out of place" among others, the "others" themselves are perceived as "out of time". Thus, a trope of post-socialist "backwardness" is being reproduced, marking Ukrainian queer utopias as imaginatively situated within Europe.

Contrary to some expectations and even the narrations of a few of my respondents, a real inclusion of queer people into Ukrainian society hasn't yet happened; people actually tend to be somewhat more tolerant in very specific situations and groups, such as an Armed Forces troop, or volunteership. However, on a wider societal level, even the fact that LGBTQIA+ people are also fighting hasn't yet led to a common acceptance towards queer soldiers, not even speaking of the civilians who stay in the rear, or those who left. LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians are still pushed to perform a "good gay citizen" image (after Maryna Shevtsova, 2018). Thus a hope that the war with Russia will somehow rewrite the societal script of proper gender and sexual behavior (following Mosse, 1985) hasn't yet been fulfilled, although the argument of necessity to separate oneselves from Russia's heterosexist gender order and lean towards "European diversity values" sounds more than often in current Ukrainian queer and feminist agenda.

Conclusions

Several general conclusions can be drawn from my findings in addition to what is already outlined in the analytical chapter summaries.

First, my hypothesis that LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians undergo an intersectional minoritization, drawn from Madina Tlostanova's, as well as Robert Kulpa and Joanna Miezelinska's theories of post-socialist Eastern European states subalternity to Western Europe (Tlostanova, 2012; Kulpa and Miezelinska, 2011), and from David Chioni Moore's theory on Russian colonialism towards Ukraine (Moore, 2001), has shown itself to be correct through the data obtained from my LGBTQIA+ Ukrainian respondents.

Whereas those who went abroad due to the war were getting racialized and minoritized as Ukrainians, while being treated respectfully as queers, long-term effects of Russian/Soviet colonialism impacted the ways national and sexual identities of my respondents were developing, especially in those born early enough to witness the end of the Soviet Union era. Most of my respondents noticed how Russian anti-gay propaganda impacted their surroundings' attitudes towards queerness, the notion pointing to a necessity to take Russian colonial influences into account more precisely when studying the origins of homophobic discourses within Ukrainian society.

I have also observed how in some of my respondents Ukrainian national identity "eclipsed" other identities, including the queer one, with the start of the full-scale invasion. As I read this through the prism of the "imagined communities" concept by Benedict Anderson (1983), the public discourses produced amidst the war "cementing" the imagined community of a nation under real attack, I suggest it is the level of the threat now "accompanying" being a Ukrainian is what makes the Ukrainian identity matter more than the other, the pressure of the external threat eventually making a shape of an identity which previously could be more "amorphic" and blended.

Second, in my observations LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians are "pushed to perform" — on the one side, a "good gay citizen" image (after Shevtsova, 2018) for the Ukrainian "audience", and, on the other side, an "almost European" and a "good, adaptable refugee" for the foreign "audiences" as soon as they consider going abroad to flee from the war. A "good gay citizen" discourse is constructed mostly around the "usefulness" and "helpfulness" of a queer individual in fighting Russia — yet even participating in the fight for real doesn't guarantee being praised and included in the society in the same way a heterosexual soldier

would be, the society and the government still denying LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians rights and recognition equal with heteronormative part of the society.

A "good, adaptable refugee" discourse, on the one side, reflects the perception by the Western Europeans of their countries as "more developed", "tolerant" (following Kulpa and Miezelinska, 2011), and thus more desirable for a queer Ukrainian subject to live in. On the other side, it reflects some Ukrainian queers' aspirations to permanently join this "gay imaginary" (after Weston, 1995) — yet as conditions of possible stay after the EU Temporary Protection Directive are undetermined as well as its final duration, Ukrainian refugees are pushed to perform quick adaptation, and for those queer the stakes are apparently higher.

Finally, my main finding concerning belonging was that LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians largely center their belonging around perceived opportunities of agential "queer worldmaking" and futurities (following Munoz, 1999, 2009). Those who, due to a variety of precarious conditions connected or not connected to queerness, have overstepped their individual "limit" of disappointment cumulation, replace their loci of what I call applied agential belonging to other countries and places, and stop identifying with Ukrainianness.

For many Ukrainian queers, however, Ukraine remains a central locus of belonging. Performing in various ways in their everyday lives disidentification with a discourse of Ukrainian nationhood as necessary heterosexist, LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians are aiming to rewrite the dominant discourses in order to make their actual world more diverse and flexible — more queer; there is hope that the Russian state homophobia will "help" this task, as Ukrainian nationhood apparently goes through final separation from the "pan-Slavic" identity mainly through constructing Russia as it's "Other" (after Kulyk, 2016). Nevertheless, as my research shows, this hope hasn't been fulfilled yet, the Ukrainian society still being far from queer inclusiveness.

Keeping Ukraine a central locus of belonging while it's at war is painful — and physically dangerous for those who choose to stay in Ukraine, reserving their world-making capacities with their embodied presence, and refusing to take a safer yet largely powerless, stuck between presence and absence, "ghostly" position (after Munoz, 2009, 33-48). The difference between the two positions, of "agential presence" of those who stay and "ghostly absence" of those who leave, produces a shift in power dynamics, and a potential schism in the society, which requires further and more detailed research.

Following my findings, my key argument is that both the intersectional approach (following Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) and the decolonial lens (following Tlostanova, 2012, and Lugones, 2010) should necessarily be employed when assessing LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians'

relations with their national identities and the state. Russian propaganda targets "Ukraine's Gayropa" *both* as Ukraine, an insurgent "Little Brother" and as "Gayropa", a "threat" to "traditional values". LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians realize they're being under attack *both* as those "belonging to a nation under attack" and as specifical political "scapegoats" by their queerness (Mackinnon, 2022). It is thus questionable whether it's worth further pursuing debates on the "issues" of Ukrainian "homonationalism" / "homopatriotism": just as cultivating self-pride and opposing homophobia and racism is seen as perfectly normal in queer people of color, LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians supporting Ukraine's self-distancing and self-defense against Russia should not be deemed abnormal. The complexity of LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians' coloniality experiences, including those of embracing one's national identity and aiming to break ties with Russia, shouldn't be dismissed and oversimplified as adaptationist as it tended to be in some of the literature prior to the full-scale Russian invasion.

Post Scriptum

It isn't a simple task, employing Munoz's queer utopia framework for the Ukrainian case, even though it fitted the best to analyze my observations. Munoz clearly wouldn't support what's in the core of my respondents' queer utopia: marriage equality, queer inclusion, and crystallized national self-consciousness within Ukrainian society[52]. However, utopias can come in different shapes and colors[53]. Following Saba Mahmood, attention to contexts and historical conditions should be paid prior to assessing the aims and desires of members of certain communities (Mahmood, 2001).

In Munoz's context of highly racialized capitalist American society the definition of queer liberation as disruption of normative structures, such as marriage and consumption, is understandable. Yet the current Ukrainian context is heavily shaped by post-Soviet "transitional" turbulences, displacement, everyday physical dangers of the war, historical trauma of Soviet repressions when families were routinely divided (Kuhr, 1998), and Russia's attempts to erase and absorb Ukrainian identity itself, the so-called "denazification" of Ukraine in a twisted logic of Russia's war tightly intertwined with "desodomization" (Druz', 2022). In such a context, building utopian futurity around living freely both as a queer and as Ukrainian, and having a place where you can invest your time without fear of being banished,

[52] I'm not completely sure, however, what his attitudes about this particular be could like — maybe he'd see Ukrainians as oppressed, too, and agree that separation from Russia's largely heterosexist domination is worth fighting for.

[53] And I'm using Munoz's framework in my work a similar way he used Ernst Bloch's framework to develop his ideas of utopia despite disagreeing with Bloch's political beliefs (see Munoz, 2009, 2)

as well as relationships that are recognized on every level, is perfectly understandable, too — even if through the Western leftist prism it can look like "opting for homonormativity" (after Duggan, 2002).

This discrepancy indicates a necessity to further decentralize theoretical vocabulary used to talk about sexuality (following Kulpa and Miezelinska, 2011), and develop specific frameworks suitable for Eastern European / post-Soviet context, taking into account not only Eastern Europe's "semi-subaltern" position towards the West (following Tlostanova, 2017) but also a complex background of transnational power dynamics within Eastern Europe itself — otherwise, its issues are at risk of getting misinterpreted.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Oral consent script.

First of all, thank you for responding to my call for participants! I am conducting research about the sense of belonging, both sexual and national, in LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians amidst the full-scale war; I'm doing this as a part of my Master's program at Central European University in Vienna. Our interview will last approximately 45 to 90 minutes: please tell me if you have any time restrictions. I'm going to ask you questions concerning your sense of belonging in various ways: I have a list of several prepared questions, and some questions will occur onsite, corresponding to the topics we'll be discussing. I want to underline that you can refuse to answer any question you don't feel like answering for any reason; you can also stop the whole interview or tell me we should make a pause at absolutely any moment. You can also withdraw from participation within 10 days after our interview; after that, unfortunately, I won't be able to extract your data from the analysis. Your participation will be anonymized completely; I will change in my thesis all the personal data which can somehow disclose your personality. I'm also going to ask for your approval to record our conversation, so that I can transcribe the recording. No one except me will have access to the recordings. It will take me some time to transcribe the recordings, and after that, if it is okay to you, I might get back with some additional questions; I will also contact you to ask for checking and approval in case I consider using some of your direct quotes for my thesis. If you have any questions, comments, or wishes concerning your participation — please feel free to let me know now or at any moment afterward.

Appendix 2. Provisional interview guide.

1. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. Do you identify with your nationality, citizenship?
3. Could you recall a community, a place, or a moment when/where you feel/felt like you belong, you're among "your people"?
4. Could you tell a story of your displacement? What affected your decisions? (if relevant)
5. When you were younger, how did people around you talk about what it means to be a Ukrainian?
6. In your opinion, what affected Ukrainians' attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ people prior to the full-scale war the most?
7. In your opinion, what the future can be like for LGBTQIA+ people in Ukraine after the war ends?
8. How does your body feel during the war?
   - Are there any differences in bodily experiences in Ukraine and abroad? (if relevant)

Appendix 3. Anonymous poll questionnaire, translated from Ukrainian.

Title: "A Poll About Belonging of Ukrainians Who (Don't) Go Abroad Due to the Full-scale Invasion"

Preface:
The following poll is being conducted within the Master's research by Eugenia Seleznova, MA student in Gender Studies, Central European University, concerning the sense of belonging of LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians amidst the Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Participation is completely anonymous. Separate quotes from some responses can be translated in English and used in the text of the thesis. Thanks for your participation!

1. In your opinion, is it important that Ukrainians stay in Ukraine during the full-scale invasion? Why?
   Free response form.

2. Are there any regions in Ukraine, from which leaving for abroad is in your opinion more or less justified?
   Free response form.

3. Do life situations exist, which make leaving for abroad absolutely justified? (For example, house ruined by Russians, having a new-born baby, etc.)
   Free response form.

4. Do life situations exist, which make leaving for abroad morally intolerable?
   Free response form.

5. Should possibilities of equal social participation be preserved for those Ukrainians who leave for abroad — for example, to vote on renaming streets in Ukrainian cities? Why?
   Free response form.

6. Please specify your current place of residence.
   Response options:
   - *In Ukraine, in a place of residence prior to 24.02.2022.*
   - *In Ukraine, "internally displaced person".*
   - *Abroad.*
   - *Abroad, migrated before the full-scale invasion.*
   - *Other.*

7. Have you noticed any change of attitudes towards you in those who appeared "on the other side" of the [Ukraine-Shengen zone] border (of Ukrainians who stayed if you left, and vice versa, those who left, if you stayed)? How exactly?
   Free response form.

8. Have you noticed any change in YOUR attitudes towards those "on the other side of the border" (Ukrainians who stayed if you left, or vice versa, those who left, if you stayed)? How exactly?
   Free response form.

9. You can leave comments and additional thoughts in the following field.

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