

The Temporality of the Experiences of Women Activists in Ukraine's Civil Society

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Abstract

After the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, Ukrainian civil society has been praised for its resistance and quick reactions to meet the needs of vulnerable civilians. This thesis provides a more focused overview of Ukrainian civil society to show that the phenomenon of such resistance lies in the past. I aim to show that civil society in Ukraine was not born on February 24th, 2022 but has been evolving throughout all years of Ukraine's independence. I analyze the development of civil society in Ukraine through such milestones in Ukraine's history as the Orange Revolution in 2004, the Revolution of Dignity in 2013, the start of the Russian aggression in 2014, and the start of the full-scale war in 2022. The focus of this thesis is women in Ukrainian civil society who stayed in Ukraine during the full-scale war and are involved in offline volunteering there. I explore the temporality of their experiences by going back to the past to try to identify the moment when their activism started, analyzing the present, and talking about hopes for the future.

This study aims to provide space for Ukrainian women in civil society to narrate their experiences on their own terms. I analyze their stories through concepts of national identity, war, and gender. The respondents reflect on their feelings of belonging to the nation and the role of women in civil society during the wartimes. The data collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews suggest that women see activism as their place for agency and volunteering as their role in the state's resistance. The respondents rely on their previous networks in their present activism and express a desire to be involved in shaping the state's future through civil society in post-war Ukraine.

Key words: civil society, national identity, militarization

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 bibliographical reference.

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

Body of thesis: 17, 503 words

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Signed: Viktoriia Shvaheer

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This thesis would not exist without constant support from my family and friends. They are the back I can always lean on, and for that I am forever thankful.

On February 24th, 2022 I felt like there was no future. I am thankful to women and men in the Ukrainian Army who make sure that there is a future for me and for everyone else.

I dedicate this work to all Ukrainian women. It is an honor to be one of you.

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List of Abbreviations

CSOs: civil society organizations

NGOs: non-governmental organizations

1. Introduction

*How do I tell you, my sister,
That my antimilitarism,
my nonviolence,
My pacifism
Have all crumbled to pieces
On the morning of February 24th
When I woke up from a sound of explosion
Outside my window
And wrote on my Facebook:
The war is here.
...
The day when I chose
To ask you
#CloseTheSky
And when that didn't happen
I asked, and I keep asking
#ArmUkraineNow¹*

This extract is from the poem that Oksana Potapova, a Ukrainian feminist scholar, wrote as an appeal to Western feminists. From the very beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, there has been a conflict based on ideological differences between the majority of Ukrainian and Western feminists on the topic of supplying weapons to Ukraine. The peak of that conflict became a manifesto “Feminist Resistance Against War” that was published on March 17th, 2022 demanding to stop any weapon delivery to Ukraine. The manifesto was signed by 151 feminists from all over the world but primarily from Western countries, none of those 151 signatures belonged to a Ukrainian feminist. In response, Ukrainian feminists published their own manifesto “The Right to Resist” asking for global solidarity and support of Ukrainian armed self-defense. A year later, the war still continues, and the voices of Ukrainian women are still not heard: the members of the University and Colleges Union just

¹ Potapova, O. “A Letter to Western Feminists”. Published on the Instagram of the NGO “UAFemNet” on March 10th, 2023

called to stop sending weapons to Ukraine during their Congress at Glasgow (Morrison, May 2023).

The discussion of this conflict is timely as never before because women are a resistance² force during the current Russian war against Ukraine: they organize protests in the occupied regions, serve in the army, keep the economy running, and evacuate their children abroad. Despite that, the international media tends to focus more on the stories of how the war affects women disproportionately in a negative way. While this is true, I believe such an approach victimizes Ukrainian women and takes away their agency. So, in my thesis, I wanted to shed light on women's active role in war-torn Ukrainian society and to show that women are not passive subjects but an active force that contributes to the resistance against the occupation. I decided to focus on women in volunteering because unpaid work has always been expected of women in traditional societies, and I wanted to see how the respondents narrate their choice to engage in volunteer work and whom this work is dedicated to: to the country, to fellow citizens, or their communities.

This study, which focuses on women's unpaid work, can contribute to uncovering the phenomena of Ukrainian resistance, shedding light on women's role in civil society³, and understanding how women choose their priorities during the time when their nation is in a war of self-defence. Russian war on Ukraine did not only affect Ukraine, but it also had an impact on the entire world. Russian missiles kill civilian women, and the Russian army uses rape as a weapon of war (OHCHR, 2022). The war crimes against women make standing against Russia's invasion a feminist issue, an issue that requires international solidarity. To

² In this thesis, resistance is defined as embracing any active role in helping your nation preserve its independence against an external aggressor

³ In this thesis, civil society is defined as the "third-sector" of society that is united by common goals and vision. That includes all charity and non-governmental organizations, and small local initiatives of individuals

ensure the said solidarity, Ukrainian voices need to be amplified. Referring to a famous Spivak article, “Can the Subaltern speak?”, this thesis is written to show that they can. The problem is that they are often not listened to.

I left Ukraine on February 28th, 2022, after spending three days on the road from my hometown Zaporizhzhia in the southeast of Ukraine, to the border with Poland, and my emotional state still did not let me go back, even for a visit. I have lived with a feeling of guilt for not doing enough for the most part of the last year and a half. This thesis is my attempt to use my current privileged position as a CEU student in Austria to give space in Western academia for women from Ukrainian civil society to narrate their stories.

My research aims to investigate Ukrainian women’s volunteering experiences during the full-scale war, define their motivations to be an active part of civil society, and connect their narrations of the past, present, and future. Temporality is worth exploring because it lets us see the bigger picture of societal processes instead of focusing on just a small part of it. To do so, I reviewed the literature on the militarization of Ukrainian civil society, civil society in past examples of war-torn countries, and women’s roles in activism and in the nation’s projects in the second chapter of this thesis. The third chapter provides an overview of Ukrainian civil society, where I discuss the waves of its activation and cooperation with international organizations. Big milestones of modern Ukrainian history that I refer to in the literature review and in the overview of Ukrainian civil society are the Orange Revolution in 2004 against the falsification of the results of the presidential elections; the Revolution of Dignity in 2013 against the pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovich who was a president at that moment; a start of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and an armed conflict in some parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine; and a start of the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022. In the fourth chapter, I discuss

the methodology of this study in detail. I describe the difficulties and limitations of documenting the ongoing history of a military conflict and the importance of doing such research. The analytic part of this thesis is divided into three chapters (5,6,7) that cover the past, the present, and the future of the respondents' engagement in civil society. In the first chapter of the analytical part (5), I discuss the past of my interviewees: their volunteering experiences (if any) that occurred before February 24th, 2022, and respondents' narrated perceptions of their own national identity. This part allows me to step back and look for the roots of my respondents' civil society experience. Here I am looking for moments in the past that constructed their way of thinking and influenced how their decision-making process worked in the present. In the second chapter of the analytical part (6), I focus on the respondents' role in the present Ukrainian civil society during the ongoing full-scale Russian invasion. Firstly, I discuss their current volunteering experiences: what they do, and how they narrate their role and contribution. Secondly, I describe their evaluation of the work of Ukrainian civil society, the Ukrainian government, and international organizations. Thirdly, I analyze their decision to stay in Ukraine during the war while having the option to evacuate abroad: what or who influenced their decision, and if this decision was made because or against what the respondents thought was expected from them. Lastly, I describe the respondents' understanding of what it means to be a Ukrainian woman nowadays and how they see themselves fitting in that description. In the third chapter of the analytical part (7), I describe the respondents' future as they see it. This includes their hopes and vision for their own future, for the future of Ukraine, and the vision of their role in a post-war Ukrainian society.

2. Literature Review

This chapter overviews the existing literature on the roles of civil society during conflicts, the militarization path of Ukrainian society, women as activists during the years of the independence of Ukraine, and the connection between gender and nation. The existing literature seems to focus more on how wars harm women and have gaps in highlighting women's active role during the conflict, especially if this role is not in peace-building activities; my study will contribute to filling the gap with a narration of stories of Ukrainian women who are involved in humanitarian activities of volunteering but at the same time, support militarization of society.

2.1. Militarization of Ukrainian civil society

International organizations that come to conflict-prone or post-conflict countries are usually ambassadors of liberal peace. The problem with this concept is that it makes international organizations look at other societies through Western lenses, completely ignoring the local context (Berg, 2020). When I was doing research on civil societies during different war or armed conflict contexts, analyzed literature usually focused on liberal peace-building activities and humanitarian aid distribution by activists and organizations, where the militarization of society is a negative outcome that activists should fight against (Barnes, 2006; Elayah&Verkoren, 2019; Fischer, 2011; Simmons, 2018). However, in my thesis, I explore how Ukrainian civil society actors involved in humanitarian missions do not advocate for peace talks and instead ask for more weapons. To comprehend this current militarization of Ukrainian civil society, I am providing a historical trajectory of how peaceful and demilitarized society that Ukraine was in 1991, became 15th in the military strength ranking in 2023 (Global Firepower statistics). I am focusing on two waves in this trajectory: the demilitarization wave 1991-2013 and the militarization wave 2013- 2023 in order to claim

that the case of Ukraine cannot be analyzed from the Western lens and that Ukraine's militarization is not a threat to the world since it has a self-defense nature.

Ukraine gained independence from the Soviet Union through peaceful protests full of music, dances, concerts, and legal voting (Dudko, 2022). People believed that if such a huge empire collapsed without acts of violence, then this should be the way to go. Following the concept of liberal peace, Western democracies presented demilitarization as a path to democracy. Hence, Ukraine voluntarily gave up its nuclear weapons in 1994 in exchange for security guarantees from the UK, the USA, and Russia (Kelly & Lonsdorf, 2022). The first two big protests independent Ukraine had: "Ukraine without Kuchma" against Leonid Kuchma, who was a president at that moment, and the Orange Revolution, against the falsification of the presidential elections, were also peaceful and, at least to some extent, reached their goals. The Euromaidan protest in 2013 started peacefully too, but everything changed when the police used force against the protestors, resulting in the deaths of 103 civilians. Police brutality at the Euromaidan, ordered by the pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich, shook Ukrainian society. People were celebrating the more or less successful outcome of the revolution (the regime of Yanukovich was toppled when he escaped to Russia) while at the same time realizing that they got this outcome only by force and at a price of 103 people's lives. Right after the end of the revolution, Russia launched an illegal annexation of Crimea and started an armed conflict in the east of Ukraine. Ukrainian army at that point was almost non-existent, with only 1% of the country's budget allocated to military needs. With international security guarantees, the Ukrainian population did not consider the army worthy of a big budget portion. However, the start of Russian aggression in 2014 changed the opinions of Ukrainians toward militarization. In May 2014, Ukrainian citizens elected Petro Poroshenko, whose motto was "Army, Language, Faith," as the next president in the first round of the elections. Ukrainian political scientist Ihor Hryniv commented that the motto "Army, Language, Faith"

now exists outside of connection with Poroshenko and became a fundamental national idea of Ukrainians and the country's politics after the start of the full-scale invasion (Vysoky Zamok, 2023). Representatives of Ukrainian CSOs, who would call themselves pacifists just a couple of years ago, are now advocating for arming Ukraine and military service as they concluded that the militarization of society is an issue of survival (Ptak, 2022).

2.2. Civil society in other war-torn countries

Drawing from the experiences of other countries that have gone through similar challenges as Ukraine can help better understand the relationships between local CSOs and international organizations. I analyzed the literature on the Bosnian War of 1992-1995 to draw assumptions about which narratives of the present and future my respondents might have.

I take an example of the war in Bosnia 1992-1995 to draw some parallels between their wartime civil society and current civil society in Ukraine, as I see some similarities between the Croatian invasion of Bosnia and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. I am analyzing the roles of Bosnian and international organizations during the period of 1992-1995 to see if there are similarities in the distribution of roles between local and international organizations in Ukraine during the Russian invasion.

Lorand (2018) reports that the new forms of self-organization and activism that were led by women appeared in Bosnia after 1985. This was also the time when the cooperation of Bosnian civil society with international organizations was becoming more and more common. While those activist groups mostly worked on issues of women's rights in Bosnia, the beginning of the war in 1992 started a boom in founding many women's war-related informal organizations. Most of the organizations were humanitarian in nature, created with the help of international organizations and with the goal of assisting civilians affected by war. Women who were members of those informal groups said that during the war, civil society in

Bosnia relied on a network of previous activism and collaborated on principles of solidarity, mutual help, and a sense of belonging. It is also reported that most of the international organizations withdrew their support right after the war ended. However, the need for humanitarian assistance was still there, so the informal organizations that were started at the beginning of the war got registered as official NGOs to keep helping civilians that were relying on them (Popov-Momčinović, 2020). This is relevant, so we can see how women in CSOs in other war-torn countries narrate their experience, what motivates local initiative groups to get registered officially, and what kind of assistance the Ukrainian civil society can expect from the international organizations after the war.

In this research, I am focusing on analyzing the respondents' perception of the role of Ukraine's civil society and international organizations during the full-scale war in Ukraine. The example of Bosnia shows that women in activism during the war relied on their previous networks, so I also want to see if Ukrainian activists had a similar experience.

2.3. Women in Activism

In this section, I am analyzing literature on women's active involvement in Ukraine's three major momenta in modern history: the Orange Revolution in 2014, the Revolution of Dignity in 2013, and the start of the full-scale war in 2022 in order to see how the visibility of women has been changing throughout these milestones in history. I review the literature on how women were portrayed during these milestones and how they narrated their own involvement: are women in activism "caregivers," ambassadors of societal change, or leaders of agency? Then, I apply the concepts of women in activism that literature suggests to analyse the narratives of my respondents.

Various international studies state that women, on average, are more involved in volunteering and dedicate more time to it (Cherneva, 2022; Seckinelgin, 2010; Taniguchi, 2006). Some of

the proposed explanations are that women are supposed to be nurturing and caring within patriarchal frames, so they are expected to care more about societal issues, or that patriarchy assumes that men are the prime breadwinners, so women should have time to do unpaid work. Another explanation might be that women are usually left out of politics and media, so civil society is the only place for them to make a change. I also would suggest that “gender performativity,” a famous theory proposed by Judith Butler, can play a role in women’s high level of involvement in volunteering, where the labor of love is a social performance women do to fit into the prescribed role and receive societal recognition.

Hrycak (2007) researched women’s involvement in the Orange Revolution in 2004, the first big protest where citizens were demanding a pro-European instead of a pro-Russian course of the state and where women activists and women’s organizations played a crucial role in achieving the protest’s success. However, instead of having public visibility, women activists embraced the role of “activist mothering,” a term introduced by Nancy Naples in 1998 while describing grassroots women’s organizations providing unpaid services for their communities. Hrycak (2007) suggests that during the Orange Revolution, women often did not see themselves as those who made a change but rather as those who were there to assist and support male protestors they were related to.

The situation changed in 2013 during the Revolution of Dignity, where 45% of all protestors and even some of the protest organizers were women. Hence, the visibility of women’s participation during Euromaidan was much broader than during previous protests (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022). Phillips (2014) conducted interviews with women who participated in Euromaidan and reported that the motivation for women to join the protests was very similar to men’s: dissatisfaction with the government, pro-European beliefs, civic duty, and hopes for a better future. However, newspapers and TV reports still portrayed protestors

through gender bias: men as active fighters and women in the rear doing cooking, cleaning, and providing medical assistance. Men tended to exclude women from dangerous activities during Euromaidan, saying this level of risk was for men only and women's efforts to be useful besides cooking and giving medical help were not valued (Phillips, 2014). As a response to the exclusion, women formed a Women's Squad at Maidan that shared the values of peaceful protest. They also provided women with military training and demanded that male protesters accept them as equals and include them in the strategic planning of the barricades' perimeter.

Knowing how fast the contributions of women were forgotten during previous revolutions (Hrycak, 2007), Ukrainian feminists made sure to document women's participation in Euromaidan: they organized photo exhibitions highlighting women as protestors, rephrased one of the major Maidan's greetings "Glory to Heroes!" – a typical salute of Ukrainian right nationalists - with "Glory to Heroines!" (Mayerchyk, 2015). Nikolayenko and DeCasper (2018) published interviews with some women who participated in Euromaidan. In their findings, mostly women aged 18-25 wanted to highlight that women were not just helping during the protests but were actively participating in them. Women also named some other motivational factors why they joined the protests that were different from men's motivation: a desire to be near their spouses and motherhood, meaning a desire to provide a better future for their children (Nikolayenko & DeCasper, 2018). While exploring different types of involvement of Ukrainian women in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in the period of 2013-2022, Koshulko and Dluhopolsyi (2022) concluded that women did not need to identify as feminists to take up an active role in civic society, most of them identified themselves as patriots, ordinary women, and citizens of their country. When I was looking for the respondents for this study, identifying as a feminist was not a requirement. I was interested in collecting stories of different women and seeing which identities were important to them.

As Russia launched a full-scale invasion in 2022, women appeared on the front lines of civil society yet again, volunteering to take an active role when the nation needed it (Protsiuk, 2022). “If asked what Ukrainian women do in this war, one can respond with confidence ‘Women do everything,’” Oksana Kis, a Ukrainian researcher, said during “(In)Visible Agency: Ukrainian Women’s Experiences of the Russian War on Ukraine” event, highlighting the role of women in the army, in volunteering, and the economic sector. The visibility of women, who are now not only serving as soldiers, a role usually assigned to men, but also are on the home front taking up tasks such as providing humanitarian aid, assisting internally displaced people, producing camouflage nets, and sewing military garments, definitely increased. However, the question remains: how much women’s contributions will be valued and appreciated in a post-war society (Fung, 2022)?

As a rule, women’s resistance during wartime stays invisible and underestimated (Koshulko & Dluhopolskyi, 2022), while most literature focuses on theorizing how war harms women more disproportionately than men. While women can engage in different types of armed and unarmed resistance, this research focuses on women who participate in resistance through volunteering. In this way, I hope to make Ukrainian women’s role during the full-scale Russian invasion more visible and recognized.

2.4. Gender and Nation

In my research, I am analyzing if there are connections between the narratives of feelings of national identity and belonging of the respondents and their active volunteering during the war. To help me with it, I reviewed the literature on women’s roles in national projects in Ukraine. In order to analyze the narratives of activists from Ukraine, I am reviewing the literature on the role of women in the nation’s projects and on a vision of a woman in Ukrainian society specifically.

Yuval-Davis (1997) stated that women have always had a specific gendered role in a nation's projects: they are responsible for the biological reproduction of the nation as well collective representation of the nation's identity and honor. While putting such important roles on women, the state usually refuses to recognize them as equal citizens to men, arguing that women are identified with "nature" and should be dominated by men who are identified with "culture." A similar symbolic role has been given to women in Ukrainian society from the very early years of the Ukrainian state. Still, it has always been presented differently, as a superior one. While being fairly patriarchal in traditions and distribution of roles, duties, and responsibilities, Ukraine has always been positioned as a matriarchal one where women have some supernatural power given by nature or God. Rubchak (2001) describes the struggle of Ukrainian women to figure out what "womanhood" actually means. The identity of Ukrainian women is often summarized in the image of "Berehynia": a mythical female creature that protects homes from evil and brings happiness to families. The image of "Berehynia" is still very much alive in contemporary Ukraine. Now it characterizes a "real" Ukrainian woman: someone who cares for her family, community, and country. It got transformed into a Ukrainian understanding of women's empowerment and meant a modern superwoman: someone who works, does her share of community service, and at the same time takes care of her husband and children at home. Thus, the identity of a "Ukrainian woman" is founded both on the ideas of feminism, where they are active participants in the workforce and of political decision-making processes, and on the ideas of nationhood, where they are expected to have children and take care of their families, and communities. This is served under the idea of the superiority of women with supernatural power to carry double shifts of responsibility, unlike men, who are portrayed as helpless without women (Rubchak, 2001).

Kis (2003, 2015) explored the phenomenon of the image of "Berehynia" too, saying that as in any other nation's projects, Ukrainian women have always had 2 roles: to give birth to

children to ensure the survival of the nation and to serve as a symbol of their nation.

However, this image also ensured women's active participation in nationalist movements. Kis describes the national femininity of Ukrainian women during nationalist movements in the 1940-50s in Western Ukraine, fighting for the independence of Ukraine from the Soviet Union. I analyzed this article on national femininity because I see similarities between national movements to get independence from the USSR and the mobilization of civil society now to fight against Russian aggression. Kis (2015) reports that many women explained their participation in the movement through their national sense of awareness. Many also said that they took up an active role because they had some kind of personal relationship with male soldiers. Even though women during the nationalist movement were mostly involved in traditional female caregiving activities: cooking, nursing, and doing laundry, they did not consider these as household chores anymore because it was done for the army. Therefore, even though women kept doing what they did in the private sphere, they became "political actors with the feeling of belonging to the great cause of national liberation, raising their self-esteem and self-confidence" (Kis, 2015, p.64). The role of women in nationalistic movements was appreciated, but only as long as they stuck to their gender-specific skills; women were not allowed to go further and get into the army or decision-making entities. At the same time, if being caught, women faced the same type of punishment as men: years of exile to Siberia (Gentes, 2003).

Pavlychko (1996) and Zhurzhenko (2001) see the image of "Berehynia" in a more optimistic way and say that while it does tie up women more to traditionally feminine roles, it also encourages them to be more involved in political and public life, even if under certain conditions. This lets women become more active members of society within their national identity and be more connected to their nation's roots after communism times when all ethnicities had to be "one big friendly state." Zhurzhenko (2001) sees it as a hope that once

women are more active citizens, they have enough confidence and power to shift the frames of the national project and gain more public roles for themselves while constructing mainstream Ukrainian feminism that is based on their national feelings unlike hegemonic feminism that denies compatibility of feminism and nationalism (Hrycak, 2007).

In my research, I am focusing on the feelings of national identity (and if there are any) of the respondents to see how it fits within the existing literature, what shapes it, and how the full-scale war influenced it. The literature seems to disagree on whether the image of “Berehynia” can damage or improve women’s autonomy. I want to fill the gap by letting the respondents narrate their juggling of personal affairs and public ones that they do for the country’s sake and how much of an influence they think the nation’s project has on their decisions.

3. Overview of the Context: Civil Society in Ukraine

This chapter aims to provide a detailed overview of Ukrainian civil society: how it has been developing throughout the years of independence of Ukraine, its cooperation with large international organizations, and how it has functioned in times of crisis. I am doing an overview of the Ukrainian civil society to understand better the circumstances that could shape the volunteering experiences of my respondents and influence their motivation to volunteer. Knowing the context will be useful while analyzing the narratives of the volunteering experiences of the respondents. This chapter relies on analyzing pieces of research on civil society that were conducted both by foreign and Ukrainian organizations. Those reports that foreign organizations present were still prepared in cooperation with Ukrainian representatives. They suggest that Ukrainian civil society benefited from cooperation with international organizations in the past and that it was primarily Ukrainian CSOs responding to the population's needs during the first weeks of the invasion.

3.1. The Evolution of Ukrainian civil society

This subchapter analyzes the path of Ukrainian civil society from the time Ukraine regained independence in 1991 till the start of the Russian aggression in 2014. I am arguing that the Orange Revolution gave a push to the development of CSOs in Ukraine, and the process accelerated with the start of the Revolution of Dignity. I am also reflecting on the volunteer-based nature of Ukrainian CSOs compared to the Western CSOs, whose volunteers are mainly paid, at least partially. This subsection helps to picture the preconditions that affected my respondents' decisions to join the civil society.

The first case when Ukrainian civil society showed political activism en masse since regaining independence in 1991 was the Orange Revolution in 2004. Stewart (2009) suggests that the NGO sphere started developing in Ukraine after the Orange Revolution, which let

Ukraine firmly identify itself as a European country that wanted to move into the EU direction in the international arena. Simultaneously, Kuts (2006) argues that this was also the time when international organizations started giving big grants to Ukrainian CSOs more actively.

To analyze the development of Ukrainian civil society, two Ukrainian organizations: the Counterpart Creative Center and the Center for Philanthropy, whose mission is to support civic initiatives, carried out comprehensive research on Ukrainian civil society through a mixed methodology that was developed by the CIVICUS World Alliance of Citizen Participation: a review of existing information, consultations with 76 regional stakeholders, community survey (400 respondents), media review, and two fact-finding studies. At the beginning of the Orange Revolution, they gave the civil society in Ukraine a grade of 1.9 for values and 1.4 for impact (with a 3 being the highest possible grade). During this evaluation, the highest grade, 2.7 out of 3.0, was given for diversity of representation among civil society participants, with women being one of the well-represented social groups. Approximately 30% of the evaluated CSOs relied on volunteers' help, and another 30% of organizations had no paid employees (Kuts, 2006). If to compare these results with the evaluation of Ukrainian civil society before 2004, the conclusion is that the Orange Revolution caused an outburst in the development of CSOs in Ukraine.

In 2011, 575 Ukrainian civil society organizations took part in the study of CCC Creative Center, a Ukrainian organization that supports civil society development, by filling in a detailed questionnaire about their activities. The results showed that analyzed Ukrainian CSOs put in much effort to establish rapport with the public and by 2011 were pretty confident in their visibility among the population: 51% of polled organizations said that the public is aware of their existence and their activities, and another 20% of organizations said

that the general population supports their activities. Most of the polled CSOs (81%) also confirmed that they use at least some kind of mass media to distribute information on their agenda among the public and influence the public's opinion (Palyvoda, 2012). This research also showed that volunteering for CSOs did not go away and that 69% of all civic organizations in Ukraine still involved volunteers in their work. On average, every CSO had 13 people volunteering for them, each dedicated 6 hours per week to volunteering. The most common groups to volunteer for civic organizations were students (73%), program beneficiaries (34%), the elderly (11%), and housewives (8%). As for the compensation for volunteers' work, most NGOs offered study opportunities, informational and other non-monetary support, and the possibility of future employment within the organization (Palyvoda, 2012).

Representatives of randomly chosen fourteen Ukrainian NGOs were interviewed by the UK Humanitarian Innovation Hub, an initiative that seeks to improve global humanitarian action and is funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office. The interviews showed that the representatives of the NGOs believed that before 2014 Ukrainian civil society had a drive for change but lacked theoretical knowledge. The start of the armed Russo-Ukrainian conflict in the Donbas region of Ukraine in 2014 changed the relationship between Ukrainian and international organizations: if earlier, the latter were mostly only giving grants to Ukrainian organizations; in 2014, such large organizations as the UN and Red Cross deployed their staff to Ukraine to assist with a humanitarian emergency where they had to work closely with eastern local Ukrainian NGOs. Partnerships with international actors let Ukrainian civil society get familiar with international norms of humanitarian response, a skill that came in handy at the start of the full-scale invasion (UK Humanitarian Innovation Hub, 2022). It is also noted that the level of expertise of activists of NGOs that were based in the western part of Ukraine was improving too, thanks to constant

collaborations with the neighboring Polish NGOs: they learned fundraising techniques, how to build networks, and ways to look for grant opportunities (Stewart, 2009). At the same time, 260 interviews with Ukrainian civil society organizations conducted by OSCE special monitoring mission to Ukraine showed that Ukrainian civil society still preferred to rely on themselves and the Ukrainian population rather than seek help from international actors. Researcher Clearly (2016) explained this by claiming that Ukrainian civil society organizations cannot meet strict accountability requirements imposed by international organizations.

3.2. The Revolution of Dignity as a point of no return in Ukrainian civil society

This subchapter analyzes how the Revolution of Dignity affected the role of CSOs in Ukraine and the population's attitudes toward volunteering. This is important to review in order to analyze the narrations of my respondents, as for many of them, volunteering started with the Revolution of Dignity.

The CCC Creative Center, which supports and researches Ukrainian civil society, published a comprehensive study of the activities of civil society organizations in Ukraine between the years 2002-2013. They reported that even though there were 76,575 civil organizations and 14,729 charitable foundations registered in Ukraine in 2013, only 4000 of them were active, while the rest just stopped functioning at some point because they could not get the funding for their projects or did not have much knowledge on how to run a CSO. Most of those functioning organizations worked in the sector of children and youth, human rights, and civil education (Palyvoda, 2014). Overall, volunteering was not very popular in Ukraine until 2013: Ukraine was rated 150th in the World Giving Index in 2010, with only 5% of the population being actively involved in volunteering. However, the start of the Revolution of Dignity changed people's perception of volunteering. Dozens of volunteer initiatives such as

#EuroHostel (Kyiv residents were offering to host people from other cities who came to protest), #Maidan.Medics and #Euromaidan.SOS (medical workers, lawyers, and psychologists ready to provide their services for free) evolved in the first days of the revolution. Civil society united even more at the beginning of Russian aggression in 2014, which started with the annexation of Crimea and the occupation of parts of the Ukrainian Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Ukraine was left without the ruling power then, so Ukrainian CSOs took over the responsibility of equipping volunteers joining the army. The main direction of volunteer work in 2014 became assistance to the army and to the wounded- 70% of volunteers worked in this sphere. By the end of 2014, already a quarter (23%) of all Ukrainians were volunteering (Matiash, 2017). A civil society researcher Kateryna Zarembo described such a rise in volunteering initiatives as both a positive and negative phenomenon because while volunteers strengthened the country by filling in the critical gaps in the abilities of the institutions, they also weakened the state because it became easier for the population to rely on volunteers instead of demanding institutional changes from the government (The Center of Civil Freedoms, 2017). Cleary (2016) noticed such a tendency in Ukraine, too and called this phenomenon a hybrid society, meaning that in times of conflict, civil society starts providing basic public services because the government cannot fulfill its role.

Kyiv International School of Sociology conducted research in 2016 to determine the level of trust toward social institutions among the Ukrainian population. They interviewed 2040 people in all regions of Ukraine (except Crimea and occupied parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions). They stated that volunteers and non-governmental institutions (scored 53.5% i 37% in a level of trust) are in the top 4 most trusted social institutions among Ukrainians, with only the Church (56.7%) and the Armed Forces of Ukraine (53.1%) having a higher score.

3.3. Ukrainian and international organizations during the full-scale war

This subchapter focuses on the responses of Ukrainian and international organizations at the beginning of the Russian invasion to argue that Ukrainian CSOs took up the main role in responding to the humanitarian challenges of the invasion. Articles and reports that are overviewed in this subchapter suggest that the reasons for the slow and inefficient work of the international organizations are their lack of preparedness for a possibility of invasion, the absence of the majority of their staff in Ukraine at the start of Ukraine, and impartial feelings regarding the invasion.

With the start of the full-scale war, an estimated number of 6.5 million Ukrainians became internally displaced. Those are people who either lost their homes due to missile attacks or whose homes are in the occupied/pre-front territories. Together with their homes, the majority of these people also lost their sources of income, putting them in need of humanitarian aid (UNHCR, 2022). Huge international organizations like the UN and ICRC received millions of US dollars in donations to help Ukrainians. Foreigners preferred donating to huge international organizations over Ukrainian-based ones because they trusted them more. The UN and ICRC have assisted civilians during previous wars and earned a long-lasting reputation as neutral caregivers who become quasi-state organizations during armed conflicts. In addition, their neutral status and international recognition give them the means to get into the hot spots of the conflict (Sergatskova, 2022). While these characteristics of the international organizations were appealing to foreign donors, Ukrainian civil society criticized those organizations heavily for not doing even a bare minimum. Some accusations against ICRC are that they are absent in war-torn cities, work only in safe areas, and did not put any effort into creating humanitarian corridors to evacuate civilians from hot spots (Carter, 2022).

The United Kingdom Humanitarian Innovation Hub research (2022) shows that during the first 6 weeks of the full-scale invasion, all humanitarian aid inside Ukraine was organized and distributed by pre-existing Ukraine-based NGOs and newly-created local help groups. In safer areas, the majority of humanitarian aid was donated by locals and then distributed by Ukrainian NGOs among arriving internally displaced people. As for the hot spots of fighting, humanitarian aid there was delivered by paramedics and volunteers who were going back and forth to evacuate civilians. The boom in volunteering came to Ukrainian society again in the time of crisis: 8% of all registered charity organizations that function in Ukraine right now were created in April 2022, contributing to the total number of 15 679 charity organizations in Ukraine. The number of initiatives created after the full-scale war and keep working unregistered is expected to be higher (Zagoriy Foundation, 2022).

The reason international organizations were unable to respond during the first months of the invasion when help was needed the most was their lack of preparedness for times of conflict. International organizations that were located in Ukraine did not even have the financial resources to prepare properly for the possibility of war: for the last couple of years, the conflict in the Donbas region was more in a frozen state, and the flow of foreign humanitarian aid that was counted in billions during 2014-2016, was gradually shrinking. When in February 2022, the probability of the invasion became very likely, the priority of the international organizations was to evacuate most of their staff abroad as their work protocol was not written for the war. When the full-scale invasion started, most international organizations were not there to assist. Foreign workers started returning to Ukraine around April 2022, and even then, they were mostly located in a safer, western part of Ukraine close to the EU border. Therefore, assisting people in the pre-front and front zones, where civilians suffered the most, fell on the shoulders of local organizations, who rose to the challenge despite not having the funds and resources that international actors have. Another reason why

local groups were more successful in providing humanitarian aid is that they are run by Ukrainians themselves, who are driven by a sense of national unity and a desire to help their own people in need, unlike large organizations who treated helping Ukrainians as just another routine work task and kept neutral feelings towards the unfolding war (UK Humanitarian Innovation Hub, 2022). In my thesis, I explore if the listed reasons: a sense of national unity and a desire to help fellow citizens, were the factors that drove my respondents to volunteer.

Some of the major Ukrainian activists expressed their disappointment in how international organizations responded to the start of the full-scale invasion (Sergatskova, 2022).

Oleksandra Matviychuk, head of the Center for Civil Liberties, said that while local Ukrainian organizations focused on the mission, the international ones cared more about rules and procedures. She believed that large organizations do not know the local context and refuse to change their old ways of doing things even if those ways do not work anymore.

Olena Shevchenko, head of two Ukrainian NGOs that protect women's and LGBTQ+ people's rights, said that the first months of the invasion felt like endless filling out of Excel spreadsheets to account for the spent funds and of grant applications in hopes of getting more financial support from the international organizations,- activities that felt like a waste of time to her as she could have spent it helping people. In response to facing little to zero help from large organizations, Ukrainian NGOs mobilized to look for funding from smaller European civil societies and to create a working system of collecting requests from fellow citizens, finding and buying needed items, and then distributing them among the population (Sergatskova, 2022).

Therefore, in my work, I aim to analyze how the respondents narrate their contribution as local Ukrainian civil society representatives, and the contribution of international organizations to supporting civilians in need. My work fills in the gap in the literature on how

the CSOs function during the war, as it expands on the strategies women activists used to attract funds and volunteers.

4. Methodology

This is qualitative research with semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection. I chose semi-structured interviews to collect data for this study because they allow to set a structure in having a pre-prepared set of interview questions and also let interviewees have the freedom and space to expand on whatever they find important (Adams, 2015). The interview questions were open, so the respondents could decide where they wanted to start their stories and what to focus on while telling them: events, their feelings, and emotions, the difficulties of their experience, or on the other hand, some positive moments. I wanted each interview to be a flow of my respondents' thoughts. As Tamboukou (2020) proposed, we should allow the story to start from anywhere and end at any point; therefore, I aimed to clear my mind and come to each interview without big expectations of what I will learn and hear from the interviewee. I figured that was the best way not to seem biased and prejudiced to the interviewee, so she would feel at ease to share any kind of her thoughts. The interview guide was created with my research questions in mind: how women narrate their choice to volunteer, what women rely on in their activism, and what kind of influence their past experiences and vision of the future play in their present activism.

4.1. Data Collection

Overall, I conducted twelve interviews. The profile of the potential interviewees I was looking for was to be a Ukrainian woman by citizenship who is located in Ukraine and did volunteering during the full-scale invasion. To find interviewees, I made a call for participants that explained my research topic in two Facebook groups: "Feminists UA" (10k followers) and "AC to stop Russia" (a group where activists share volunteering opportunities with 314 followers). I also made the same post on my personal Facebook and Instagram pages, and 4 of my friends reshared it to their pages. All interviews happened via Zoom and in the Ukrainian language. Twelve women I interviewed are from 21 to 38 years old and

come from different socio-economical backgrounds. I also managed to interview women affected by the war in various ways: some live in their native city, some have been internally displaced since 2014, and some have been internally displaced since 2022. A more detailed overview of the profiles of the respondents can be found in Appendix 1.

Building rapport with respondents was not a difficult task. I thank for this my privilege of being “in” (Fontana & Frey, 2003). Our common ground helped me establish rapport: I am Ukrainian too, and the fact that the interview could be done in the interviewee's native language. My goal was not only to get data from the interviewees but give something in return too. Abrams (2010) talked about empowering your respondents, and in some way, the interviews I conducted gave a sense of importance to the interviewees. Most of them did not think of their experiences as special, so having someone interested in interviewing them validated their stories as worthy ones. During the interviews, I also realized how crucial it is to document ongoing history. When the respondents recalled the beginning of the full-scale war, they mentioned that memories seemed surreal to them at this point.

All ethical concerns were covered in the consent form (please see Appendix 2). Considering the default unequal power relations between the respondent and the interviewer, I wanted to make this gap as small as possible. Writing a detailed consent form helped me with this because it included the rights and responsibilities of both the interviewer and the interviewee, so my respondent knew what to expect at every stage of the process, and she also knew that she could refuse to participate at any stage.

For legal concerns, the respondents were notified that they could withdraw their participation at any point without any consequences. The consent form listed all environments where the data from the interview could be used and by which date it will be destroyed. The interviewees received a copy of the consent form prior to the interview. Then they confirmed

their willingness to participate and consent for the interview to be recorded at the beginning of the Zoom meeting. All data is stored on a CEU drive protected by two-factor authentication. The last names of the respondents are not recorded anywhere and their other personal data shown in Appendix 1 is anonymized. All interview recordings will be deleted permanently after the thesis defense. A copy of the thesis will be publicly available at CEU Library. Therefore, I decided not to mention the names of the organizations and initiatives that my respondents volunteered for to protect their identities.

4.2. Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of the study is the way data was collected. Due to personal reasons, I was unable to go to Ukraine and interview the respondents face-to-face. Personal communication is important for qualitative research because it makes respondents more comfortable.

However, Deakin and Wakefield (2014) argue that online interviews can help establish rapport easier and remove the pressure to keep participating from the respondent. Despite being online, interviews still turned out to be comprehensive. Remote data collection also helped me to cover a bigger geographical scope of the respondents, as traveling around Ukraine would be quite challenging now.

Another limitation was the difficulty of scheduling interviews. All my respondents are still active volunteers, so they did not have much free time. In addition, when I had just started data collection, many parts of Ukraine were still experiencing blackouts due to attacks on infrastructure, so three interviews had to be postponed to another day when the respondent could have electricity/internet. Furthermore, some people I contacted declined to participate because of their mental state. They said that it is much easier for them to keep volunteering and providing practical help than talk about it and let themselves analyze their experiences.

The third limitation was my positionality as a researcher. Russian war against Ukraine is still ongoing, which makes this research setting highly politicized. Following the warnings of Jessee (2011) on doing research in such an environment, I was aware that the respondents could join the interview to share their agenda with a wider audience. I did not share the interview guide with the respondents before the interview, but I told them briefly about the research. Knowing that I am writing this thesis in English for a primarily Western audience, the respondents could use the interview as a possibility to share “rehearsed stories” (Richie, 1995).

Despite these limitations, I still consider the results of this study to be significant because they document the current narrations of Ukrainian women in war activism, make the role of women during the war visible, and contribute to the field of study of Ukrainian civil society. This thesis should be treated as a snapshot of narrations of women in Ukrainian civil society in 2023 while keeping in mind that the same respondents might give different interviews later depending on the development of the current Russian war in Ukraine.

5. The Past

This chapter is the first of three analytical chapters of the thesis, aiming to analyze past experiences (if they have any) in volunteering and the civil society of the respondents.

With the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion, many international media published articles on Ukraine's civil society, praising the tremendous amount of work it took upon itself voluntarily: “Civil society steps up in Ukraine” (Civicus, 2023), “Ukraine civil society has responded to Russian aggression and banded citizens together” (RTI International, 2023), “Ukraine's other army” (Leonchuk, 2023), “Ukraine's professional civil society has maintained its watchdog function throughout the war” (Zarembo, 2022), etc. These and many other media sources communicate approval and even astonishment at how well Ukrainian civilians mobilized. A whole other set of articles highlights the active role of women in Ukraine's civil society: “How young women are driving Ukraine’s civil society during the war” (Protsiuk, August 2022), “Women’s groups and civil society organizations (CSOs) have been quick to react to the immediate priorities of their communities” (UN Women, March 2022), etc. The visibility of the work Ukraine's civil society and particularly women of that society, are doing assures that the activists are recognized in the documented history.

However, I think many of those articles focus only on the present phenomenon of Ukraine's civil society without trying to go back and search for when, how, and why that phenomenon originated. The life of current Ukrainian activists did not start on February 24th, 2022, even if they were not that civilly active before that. So, I think it is worth it to go back and try to explore what made the respondents take up an active role in civil society. The purpose of this chapter of the analytical part of the thesis is to analyze the respondents` construction of their past and draw connections to their present activism. Here I describe if there is a continuity in my respondents` activism, find a point when and how their involvement in civil society started, and what motivated them to start their activism journey. I also spot moments in the

past when the respondents` narrated perception of their national identity has been changing and what triggered that, to see what role their feelings of being Ukrainian plays in their recent decisions.

5.1. Continuity

Verta Taylor (1989, p.772) concluded her research on social movement continuity with words: “Movements do not die, but scale down and retrench... Perhaps movements are never really born anew”. These words motivated me to ask my respondents if they had any volunteering experiences before the start of the full-scale invasion and, if yes, what kind, to see if the concept of continuity is present in the Ukrainian civil society too, and to analyze when and how that desire to become a part of civil society appeared in my interviewees. Based on the interviews, there are three typologies in my sample: women who started volunteering during the Revolution of Dignity, women who volunteered in the past with the NGOs whose values they supported, and women who started volunteering after the start of the full-scale war.

For many respondents, the time when they got involved in civil society was the Revolution of Dignity in 2013, despite the fact that some were still underage at that time. There should have been an influence in their lives that motivated teenagers to get involved in volunteering connected to the revolution and the war: respondents shared that they were involved in activities like sorting and packing humanitarian aid and making camouflage netting and that these volunteering opportunities were either organized at their school or they were brought to local initiative groups to help out by their parents. Respondents shared that even though they were of school age, they had an understanding of what was going on, wanted to be useful, and wanted to be a part of a common cause. These testimonies add up to the assumption I made in the literature review that a big turn in the mindsets of Ukrainians regarding personal

responsibility for the state's affairs happened not in 2022 but in 2013. Some respondents also said that while they volunteered a lot in the period of 2013-2014, their activity faded down throughout the years due to being busy at work and in their personal life. However, they went back into 24/7 volunteering mode on February 24th, 2022 doing a similar activity they did in 2013-2014, as they already knew the population's needs and how to meet them. This shows that civil society's experience is not linear and that the population generally mobilizes during critical times for their country. Uliana commented on this phenomenon:

When Maidan happened, everything needed an instant reaction, so I volunteered day and night even though I just had my second child. However, then after 2015, you know I got divorced and had to take care of my children and make money. Hence, volunteering was not a priority anymore, even though we knew that the war was going on (armed conflict in the Donbas region), and now I think I should have done more during these years.

In this quote from Uliana, I see a narrative of urgency, which I noticed in other respondents' words, too: the situation was unstable, and there was no actual government in the country, so women felt the need to contribute and were okay with spending all their time volunteering. However, once they felt like the situation had stabilized (election of the new president, a frozen stage of the armed conflict in the Donbas region, etc.), volunteering took a second place in life with all the daily routine responsibilities going on. On February 24th, 2022, that sense of urgency came back, and they also came back into volunteering.

As for other respondents, their pre-2022 volunteering was not connected to Euromaidan and was more related to the issues they were personally interested in feminism, LGBT rights, animals, and music festivals. After February 24th, 2022, they mostly stayed in the same sphere, but the volunteering shifted into a war-related direction. For example, Maria used to help out with organizations of public lectures for youth on topics of sex education and equal

rights in society for all members, including LGBT people. After the 24th of February, she stayed in her native Odesa and wanted to feel useful and do something productive. She kept volunteering with the same NGO as before the war, but now she is packing and mailing humanitarian aid to LGBT people in need around Ukraine.

Gongaware (2010, p.233) argues that the members of social movements use their previous network connections to maintain a sense of continuity in their activism. I noticed the pattern of reliance on previous networks, in stories of women who were involved in different kinds of volunteering. I expected that connections from the time of volunteering during the Revolution of Dignity could come in handy for my respondents because it was a networking of people united by similar values and views already in 2013. In addition, the type of volunteering that people were doing in 2013 was pretty similar to what was needed at the beginning of the full-scale invasion. Therefore, knowing that they have the appropriate skills, knowledge, and contacts of like-minded people, a decision to jump back into active volunteering came naturally to my respondents. As Tetiana said:

I didn't even think whether I should or should not do it (volunteering), it was like an instinct that kicked in the morning of the 24th

Some of the respondents, for example Uliana, also said that they discussed their volunteering plans with their companions from the times of the Euromaidan a couple of months before the invasion:

Well, the talks about the war were in the air, and when I was discussing it with women who I volunteered with in 2013 and am still friends with, we all agreed that we would stay and do what we can if Russia invades, so I can say that we were already actively volunteering from the very morning of the 24th because we had a plan

This shows how people who volunteer together for the same cause build trustworthy relationships and networks that they know they can rely on both during their active

volunteering and later on too. Women built a network during their previous volunteering experience and then reached out to those people when they felt a need to do active volunteering again.

As for the respondents whose previous volunteering experience was not in the Euromaidan context but in the fields of their interests, their connections still proved useful in their new direction of volunteering. Oksana commented that during her volunteering after February 24th, she relied a lot on the assistance and support of people she met while volunteering at different charity events:

These were the people who really helped me out the most both financially and in terms of human resources. I had their contacts left, so I was just calling them saying `hey, I know that you know that person or hey, I know that you are skilled in that` and people were really replying and providing me with what I needed

As for the motivation for getting into volunteering in the past, women were referring to a sense of personal responsibility that they started feeling during Maidan times, a desire to help a minority group they belonged to themselves, feeling that volunteering experience can give them needed skills for future careers, the influence, and examples of family and friends.

5.2. Perception of National Identity

In Ukraine, nationalism is on the rise and is seen as a good thing among the population, something that helped the nation tremendously to keep its freedom. The new type of Ukrainian nationalism has been developing since the Revolution of Dignity in 2013, and it united people from different regions of Ukraine, of different ethnicities and with different mother tongues in a common vision of the future (Minich, April 2018). Ukrainian nationalism does not put global security in danger because it is civic, and not ethnic, meaning that it is defensive rather than invasive and promotes inclusivity and loyalty to the whole

nation-state, contrary to only one ethnic group (Pillar, March 2022). The level of Ukrainian nationalism started to grow in 2014 with the beginning of the Russian aggression and spread even more in 2022 with the full-scale invasion as “nationalism comes into sharper focus at certain points in time in the life of a ‘nation’ typically during crisis and always during war” (Ramet, 1995, as cited in Wan&Vanderwerf, 2009).

Nancy Morris (1995) defines national identity as “[a]n individual’s sense of belonging to a collectivity that calls itself a nation” (as cited in Wan&Vanderwerf, 2009, p.31). National identity is a collective identity, something that people don't need to have, but choose to do so due to various factors. Because it is chosen, it is even more interesting to analyze how women construct their national identity, as on average women do not have the same rights and opportunities as their fellow male citizens. Cusack (2000) states that within nations, women are usually given a huge symbolic role while still being excluded from enjoying the same political rights as men. As discussed in the literature review, both of these aspects are seen in Ukrainian nationalism, which describes Ukraine as a matriarchy with women ruling with their soft superpowers. I argue that the women I interviewed still developed strong feelings for the nation because national identities get constructed rapidly when there is an external danger. Nira Yuval-Davis (2003), one of the first researchers to make connections between gender and nationalism, argues that women are seen as The Other in comparison to men in nation-states. However, during times of external danger, people's attention is taken away from focusing on differences inside the country and makes them unite against a common threat by creating a strong “us (the nation) vs them (the enemy)” narrative, meaning that women move from the category of The Other to the category of “us” and feel a stronger sense of belonging. “The sense of national identity is never stronger than when countries are at war with each other, at imminent risk of war, or remembering war” (Evans, 2011).

By asking the respondents to narrate their perception of their national identity, I wanted to analyze how the interviewees understand and experience their feeling of belonging (or not) to the nation. Following Anderson's (1983) concept of imagined communities, I expected the respondents to name Russian aggression as a reason for their stronger national feelings, meaning that while Ukrainians do not know all other Ukrainians, they feel connected and united by a common goal against a common enemy. I asked the respondents if there were moments in their life when their perception of their national identity changed, to evaluate how that affected their decision to volunteer. Everyone here shared that they indeed had personal moments in life rethinking their national identity, what it means to them to be Ukrainian, and how they performed their personal identity to the external environment. For most, a moment that they recalled from the past when they re-evaluated their national identity was the Revolution of Dignity, as Alisa said *“it was impossible to witness such people-led change and stay indifferent”* and many, for example Uliana, named the start of the full-scale invasion as a last straw that built their strong national identity feelings:

I wasn't always as pro-Ukrainian as I am now and my current views on Ukraininess might seem radical to some, but I do not know how my or anyone else's views can be not radical when we have an enemy in our house

Some also mentioned their relationship with their mother tongue (a choice to switch to Ukrainian after growing up speaking Russian) as a defining moment of the re-establishment of their national identity. Oksana said:

Once I began talking to everyone in Ukrainian, my mum said: “oo, finally it is clear that I have a Ukrainian daughter”

And Nadia commented her choice in this way:

We really learned that the language is a weapon too, so when I started speaking Ukrainian, it was a way for me to show my strong position

In this quote, Nadia referred to all Ukrainians by saying “We” and she did so often throughout the interview even though she could not know for sure how all Ukrainians felt or thought on different matters. I see this chosen strategy of hers as a concept of imagined communities in action.

I did not ask about the ethnic background of the respondents, and the conversation on the feelings of their “Ukraininess” was connected to their feeling of belonging to the nation and to the country of their citizenship rather than their ethnicity. All respondents identified being Ukrainian as an important part of their personal identity now. Some of them come from a very patriotic background, so being Ukrainian has always been a big part of their identity, and they just noticed their positionality getting stronger under the circumstances of Russian aggression. And some other respondents, mainly those that come originally from the very eastern parts of Ukraine, did not really think of national feelings as something essential in the modern world but started thinking more about what their nationality means for them after the start of the full-scale war and put effort into learning Ukrainian history and switching to speaking Ukrainian instead of Russian.

6. The Present

This chapter aims to explore the lives, experiences, and narratives of the respondents after February 24th, 2022, to analyze what motivated them to stay in Ukraine and volunteer. While many of them, as we have seen in the previous chapter, have had volunteering experience before the full-scale war, and some were also involved in the Euromaidan activism and volunteering connected to the start of Russian aggression in 2014, the experience of volunteering after February 24th occurs under different circumstances, as Uliana commented:

It is one thing to know that the part of your country is occupied, and it is an absolutely different thing to wake up to air raids and explosions all over the country knowing that there is no safe space left and still choose to stay and volunteer

The purpose of the chapter is to let the respondents narrate their experiences after the start of the full-scale war and give the interviewees space to reflect on how they think it has changed their lives.

6.1. Current Volunteering Experience

While analyzing the current volunteering experience (after February 24th, 2022) of my respondents, I noticed three main typologies: those who used their previous Maidan times, volunteering contacts to establish initiatives, those who volunteered with some NGOs/funds before and kept volunteering with them and those who didn't really have prior structured volunteering experience or had it a long time ago but sought out a way to get involved on a regular basis from the beginning of the full-scale war.

Vira went to the military office to get enlisted as a volunteer in the Armed Forces. She was told that she had no chance to be accepted as she had no prior military experience, and instead, she was offered to volunteer at a hub where different ammunition, food, and hygiene supplies are stored before being sent to the frontlines. Vira agreed immediately and spent the next couple of months volunteering 10 hours every day: she was keeping track of stuff at the

hub, packing and mailing needed hygiene supplies to the front lines. Vira describes this volunteering as “*life-giving*” and something that gave her a sense of agency because without it, she would just sit at home being scared all the time and when she volunteers, she has a feeling that she is actively involved in bringing the victory day closer.

Oksana's volunteering experience after February 24th, 2022, started similar to Vira's as she got enlisted in the Territorial Defense Forces. She served there in her hometown for the first month of the invasion, and then when the need for the territorial defense of her region was not there anymore, she relied on her family as a network and joined the initiative her grandma was running:

My grandma has been volunteering since 2014. She has a small group of her ex-colleagues and some neighbors where they collect medical supplies, make camouflage nets, and prepare combat rations to send to the front lines. I guess earlier, I, as many others, just did not think that much that the war has been going on for 9 years actually, but now their team expanded

The idea of not just volunteering but actually getting involved as a soldier was also mentioned by Alisa. She is now running a fund together with a person she met during after-Maidan volunteering in 2014, and they create video games where a player can experience a role of a Ukrainian volunteer. They use the money earned from selling the games to buy medical supplies and technical equipment for the front lines and to send humanitarian aid to de-occupied territories. Alisa says:

now I think I really use my skills and my knowledge to the fullest to benefit the country, but actually, none of us knows what will be next, and maybe at some point I will be more needed in the army. If that point comes, I do not want to be completely useless, so I am preparing by exercising more, learning how to shoot, and taking some tactic medicine courses

Interviewees who were not involved in volunteering before February 24th say that they found their volunteering opportunities through social media. They were following the social media accounts of the NGOs before the start of the war and shared their values, so when they saw that volunteers were needed, they applied right away. This is how it happened to Lidiia. During the first month of the invasion, she was in evacuation in her native town, Kovel. She was following many organizations and local volunteers on social media, so in April, when she returned to Kyiv, she immediately joined one of the initiatives of making trips to de-occupied towns. Throughout the week, she and other volunteers, who also saw a call to help the initiative online and decided to join, were running a hub collecting clothes, sheets, personal hygiene items, and food items that ordinary people were bringing and then once a week they were making a trip to some de-occupied village/ town to deliver help to people whose houses were damaged/destroyed:

I saw many different calls for volunteers online, but this specific initiative suits me the best because I can see an immediate result of my work, talk to these people and children who do not have homes anymore, and give them some comfort. It is like I am first-hand witnessing what the war has done to our lives, and it helps me not to become distressed because I have a mission to help.

Despite not having any prior volunteering experience, Polina started looking for opportunities right away when she arrived in Ternopil, a city in the west of Ukraine, as an internally displaced person because she wanted to do her part in defending the country. She was told about a local group of women who make camouflage nets and trench candles in the center for internally displaced people, and she decided to join that initiative:

When I just came to Ternopil, I did not know anyone here, I felt lost and useless that I did not do anything helpful. This volunteering helped me to get into a better emotional state because it gave me a feeling that I am not just sitting and doing nothing, but I am actually helping to defend the country

Volunteering also helped her to meet people and make acquaintances in a new city, and stopped feeling like she does not belong there. Polina now says:

I will definitely keep volunteering after the war too. Hopefully, there will not be a need for military-related volunteering, so I could work with kids and do social theater, for example. But yes, volunteering will definitely be in my life because it makes me feel like a superwoman

6.2. Perception of the Role of the Civil Society

Some respondents started out as unregistered initiatives and then decided to register their organizations legally to be able to apply for grants. Kira started out her humanitarian hub in Sumy in the office of the local politician who gave them space. 2 months later, she and her team decided to register as an official charity fund to highlight their apolitical stance (not to be associated with any of Ukraine's political parties). Soon after they got registered, they got contacted by the NGO “World Central Kitchen,” which was looking for humanitarian initiatives in the most war-torn regions to sponsor:

It was April 2022, the time when we didn't even have to apply for grants because so many international organizations were looking for initiatives to support in Ukraine, and their own requirement was that you are registered officially

Now they work together successfully, supplying people whose houses were either destroyed or damaged with hot meals. On the other hand, Oksana says that registering their initiative brought much more unnecessary bureaucracy in their lives. Now she has to fill in many documents all the time, and grant applications are not easy to do either:

Sometimes I do get frustrated with how out of context these grant applications are because they ask for so much accountability, and most times it is just not possible to provide

These stories of how unregistered initiatives just collect money on their personal cards were not new to me because this is how an individual volunteer operates in Ukraine now: a social

media post that states the purpose of fundraising and the needed amount and a link to a volunteer's private bank card to donate. Donating is now routine for Ukrainians: a survey done by Zagoriy Foundation (2022) says that 86% of adult Ukrainians were making regular war-related donations in 2022 to Ukrainian NGOs and individual volunteers they follow on social media (in 2019 only 60% of the population were making donations). The statistics also say that the average amount of donation every Ukrainian makes is 3000 hryvnias (80 euros) a month (Karmanska, 2022). Knowing the average salaries in Ukraine, this is roughly 20% of people's income. Karmanska (2022) also says that many Ukrainians have a strategy now that every month when they receive their salary, they choose how much out of it they are willing to donate this month, and then they send half to any big registered fund and another half they send in parts to different volunteers and unregistered initiatives. Many of my family members, friends, and I do it once, and never have I heard that someone thinks this is not worth it since these volunteers technically could just keep the money for themselves. The war created social trust, a new level of solidarity, where people cannot fathom the thought that a fellow citizen will pretend to collect money for volunteering purposes and then keep the money. People who make donations trust each other because they think everyone in the country is going through the same right now, and everyone does everything possible to help the country resist. I saw this caption under an Instagram post of one fundraising initiative I supported, and I think it explains well why Ukrainians donate more and do not worry about scammers now, it is because they feel a sense of unity, collective responsibility for supporting the country, and because donating makes them feel that they contribute to the defense of the country:

A link to the jar (to make money transactions easier, every user of the Ukrainian banks has some sort of online jars where you can transfer money through the link in seconds) - this is a phrase that no foreigner will understand. How many drones, cars, medical supplies, and food were bought partly on your money? How many

*fundraising initiatives did you support during this time (the war)? To me, there is history behind these words, this is a symbol of our self-organization. This is a phrase that means someone needs your help, and you give it to them*⁴

All respondents believe that volunteers and local organizations have a crucial role in defending the country. The interviewees think that civil society now does responsibilities that in peaceful times the state should be doing, but they do not have negative feelings about it. They mostly think that the state has too much on its plate right now, so it is normal that ordinary people should take over some of their responsibilities. Respondents also tend to think of civil society as partners of the state, where civil society and the state cooperate to reach a common goal. As Alisa said:

Yes, civil society has taken over a part of a state's job now, but it doesn't mean that we have an infirm state, it just means that we faced a danger that a state itself as an institution cannot overcome. And I think this is precisely why we will win because a state is not something above us that makes a decision for us, we all are state now, and we work together with a state to get our borders back

Respondents also tend to think that now is not really the time to discuss who should do what. Vira commented that if volunteers did not supply soldiers and civilians with needed stuff because this was the state's job, then “*we wouldn't have had a country by now*”. Once asked about their personal role in defending the country, most of the respondents get shy and describe themselves as “*a tiny cog in a big machine*” or say that despite volunteering in all their free time, they still feel like they are not doing enough, and they should be doing more.

6.3. The Decision Not to Evacuate and The Reaction from the Social Circle

Ukraine has martial law that prohibits men aged 18-65 from leaving the country, at the same time women, especially women with children, are encouraged to evacuate abroad not to be in danger. All my respondents chose to stay in Ukraine during the full-scale war, I asked why

⁴ @nakypilo.ua, posted on 04.05.2023

they decided to do so and how (if in any way) their family and friends reacted to that. For many respondents, not evacuating was not even a decision they made because they didn't even entertain the thought of it. Some respondents mentioned family ties as the reason they stayed: elderly parents, husbands, or long-term male partners. Vira commented:

I have two cats and a boyfriend. Why would I go anywhere to strangeness if my home is here, and I feel needed here (at her volunteering)?

The theme of fear of uncertainty was in the answers of some other respondents, who explained their decision not to evacuate by saying that they would feel even worse being so far away and don't want to be so vulnerable in a foreign country when they feel so comfortable and confident being in their country even under constant danger. Nadia said: “*you really get used to the attacks. If during the first weeks, I was terrified, now this is just an inconvenience*”. Vira had a similar thought:

my mum was so angry with me for not leaving, but to me, it didn't even make sense after some point anymore. When half of your city is ruined, you start thinking that if you were meant to die, you would be killed by now

Three of my respondents are mothers. Having children of course affects the choices people make, but these women wanted to both keep their children safe and continue their volunteering activities, and they found a way. Uliana is a divorced mother of two children, she said she was discussing the possibility of the start of a full-scale war with her ex-husband and agreed that in such case, he would take the children and go abroad with them. However, their plan had to be changed due to the martial law that prohibited men from leaving the country since the first hours of the invasion. This did not affect Uliana's decision to stay in Ukraine to volunteer, she sent her children with her best friend to Lithuania where they currently live and Uliana goes there to visit them every 2 months. She said that luckily her

children are more grown now (10 and 14 years old), so they can understand why she is not with them and they manage to keep close mother-daughter relationships on a distance.

Thankfully, my social circle is very understanding. My mum, my friends, all supported me in this decision and told me that I was doing great. Because many strangers when they learn about this tell me that I am a bad mother who abandoned her children. Of course, it was not an easy decision to make, but I just felt like I had no choice: during the first weeks of the invasion there were constant missile attacks, so I couldn't keep my children here, but I also couldn't leave with them as I was so involved in volunteering, I was sleeping 3-4 hours a day because I was always needed

Kira has a similar story. She is from Sumy, a city right next to the border with Russia, where heavy battles were happening during the first months of the invasion. She was a known volunteer in the city before the invasion and this is why on February 25th she received a call from the local administration asking her if she wants to open and run a humanitarian hub, she agreed immediately.

So I needed to stay, but I wanted to send away my kids and I put them on the evacuation bus on March 9th with their grandma, it was a painful moment as they kept asking me why other mums are going with their children and I am not going with them. That goodbye left me with a wound in my heart because I love my children very much, but to me, volunteering was the number 1 priority. I felt huge responsibility as we already opened the hub and people were transferring to my account sums of money and this was something I was doing to save the lives of other people. My family supported me because they know this is just who I am.

Maryna was pregnant when the full-scale war started. Despite this, she stayed in her native Kramatorsk, a town in the Donetsk region right next to the front lines, till the 6th month of her pregnancy. After that, she kept making trips back to Kramatorsk to deliver humanitarian aid and to evacuate civilians until the 8th month of the pregnancy, when her colleagues noticed her baby bump and asked her not to come anymore.

My family, especially my parents, were angry with me that I stay in Kramatorsk and that I keep coming back there despite the big risk, but I just couldn't act differently.

Since the first days of the invasion, I was getting many calls from volunteers all over Ukraine who knew me personally, and they were asking me what to do because they faced it for the first time and I already had war volunteering experience in 2014. And I realized that if I give up now and tell them “Sorry, I am pregnant, I am leaving the country”, then they will give up too, and I didn't have a right to do it

Interestingly, none of these three women had a narrative that they volunteer, so their children can have a future (something that I expected) and instead, talked about volunteering as a part of their own identity and personality, separate from their love for their children.

6.4. Defining a Modern Ukrainian Woman

When I asked the respondents to describe a modern Ukrainian woman, common words were “*emancipated*”, “*independent*”, “*free to choose and do what she wants*”. Respondents are on average aware that war usually means worsening of the situation with women's rights but generally have optimistic views that this war is different because women's active role is now visible in society and women are free to decide how they want to contribute and can even serve in the army. While being shy to acknowledge their own contribution, which can be a gendered practice of being afraid to come off as too proud, the interviewees were pretty generous when describing women around them, saying how they notice that ordinary women are doing an incredible amount of work now in all spheres of social life. Oksana shared that the majority of people who volunteer at her organization are women. While some of these women's husbands are in the army, the rest keep living their civilian life where they relax after work at home while their wives go volunteer after work. Oksana says that sometimes she asks the volunteers why their husbands do not come to help, especially when there are physically demanding tasks, and they reply that volunteering is a personal choice for them that does not depend on whether other people, even their partners, do it too. So for Oksana to be a Ukrainian woman is “*to dedicate your heart to Ukraine, to be connected to Ukraine so much that you don't care who is doing what around you as long as you do your own part for*

the country". As for Kira, she noticed that on average Ukrainian women take more pride in their nationality now, but for her not much has changed in evaluating her identity:

It's weird to me when people ask if I am happy to be a Ukrainian woman, this is the same if someone would ask if I were happy to have blue eyes. I don't know, this is just a part of me, this is who I am, and I cannot change it. I love my country, this love has always been there, but I don't take any extra pride in being a Ukrainian woman now

Respondents also share the hope that the image of a Ukrainian woman will change in the international arena now. Tetiana said:

we have always known how hard-working, resilient, and brave our women are, but I think it is also shown to the world now, and hopefully it will break previous stereotypes about us

7. Future Trajectories

The third analytical chapter of this thesis aims to connect the past and present experiences of the respondents with their hopes and expectations for the future. In crisis, construction of hope is essential to survive and to make meaning of life. If to listen to speeches of different politicians in times of crisis and if to listen to speeches of different Ukrainian media people, from the president to the hosts of the news programs, hope is centric in the messages they convey to the public, and it is not accidental. Charles Snyder (1994), a psychologist who is researching the concept of hope, says that people get a sense of hope once they make the connection between where they currently are and where they want to be in the future. Once individuals picture that desired future, they can create steps to follow to get there while also developing feelings that they can do it. Therefore, hope is a much-needed element in times of crisis that helps people not give up and focus on what they can do now to get to the desired future more quickly. The changes in the mood of the Ukrainian population throughout the full-scale war have been pretty dynamic. They are a very interesting topic that probably can do for the whole other thesis, but the sense of hope has always been there. In this chapter, I want to analyze what hope the respondents have for their own future and the future of Ukraine, how they contribute to the forthcoming of that future with their current actions, and which role they see as theirs in a post-war Ukraine based on their past and current experiences.

7.1. Their Own Future

When asked about their own future, many started by focusing on the big picture first and talked about the future of Ukraine, so I needed to re-ask after their answer what they wished for their own personal future. Many felt baffled at first, either saying that this is a very difficult or interesting question and that they have not really thought much of their own future outside the context of the future of Ukraine. I think this shows how interconnected personal is

with public affairs in Ukraine now and how people are developing more of a collective thinking when they think of themselves as a part of the group first.

However, after taking some time to think, the respondents still shared their personal expectations of the future. Many started with their professional hopes, as volunteering showed them how important it is to have a job that they loved. Uliana worked as an accountant her whole life, but starting her own volunteering initiative in February 2022 gave her an understanding of what it felt like to do something for society:

This became like a job. A job that I was not paid for and a job where I was spending 12–14 hours a day, but I still was happy to do it because I knew I was helping those who need it

Volunteering also taught her how to run social projects, so she quit her accountant job and started working for the government organization in September 2022. It was a big cut, but Uliana now feels fulfilled:

I just realized that we live in a war where every day can be my last, so I did not want to spend more of my time on a job where I lose my mental and physical health. I hope to keep this attitude of putting myself first after the war too

Interestingly, when thinking about the future, many said that they want to make time to learn more about the past of the country and their own families by learning more about the history of Ukraine and finding out more about their roots, their ancestors, where their grandparents lived, and what their family went through during Soviet times. Nadia said:

I think now many people, especially from Russian-speaking regions like mine, are reflecting on their lives. If for years we were saying that we are Russian-speaking because this is how it happened historically, now we unpacked that it was forced Russification of our families. So people started speaking Ukrainian, even if it was hard, and people started feeling bad for not paying enough attention to the fact that the war started in 2014. Not in 2022, and for not caring about internally displaced people from the Donbas region as now, when they are internally displaced people,

they see how hard it is. So I think it is logical that people want to go even deeper now and explore what else our nation went through. This is what I am doing, and this is what I see many of my friends are doing - we learn about Holodomor, about deportations, about bans on our culture and language

Some respondents already think now how their NGOs' work will change after the war is over.

Alisa runs a fund that provides soldiers and medics with needed equipment and first aid kits.

She says she wants to continue her fund after the war, too but shift the focus into helping military personnel adapt to civilian life. Alisa, who is a psychologist, is now writing her Ph.D. dissertation on the topic of military psychology, so she understands what challenges soldiers will face after the war and wants her fund to assist them.

A few interviewees also have personal family planning for the future: to start having children or to have more children. Uliana, who already has two daughters, wants them to return to Kyiv once the war is over from Lithuania, where they are now in evacuation. Her daughters hope to return to their hobbies: musical school and gymnastics classes that they had in Ukraine but have no opportunity to do in Lithuania. Respondents, for example Diana, also shared how they look forward to enjoying basic civilian life moments in the future:

No big personal plans or ambitions, really. I just want to feel safe in my own home, to know that all people I care about are safe too, and also to go to our seaside again

7.2. The Future of Ukraine

Once asked about the future in a year, most of the respondents do not see much change happening in such a short time and think the war will still be going on. The timeline most give for the end of the war is 2–3 years more. In a further future (5 years and more), respondents see Ukraine optimistically. Every respondent mentioned that they hope Ukraine will become a member of the EU and NATO and that Ukraine will progress pretty fast thanks

to international institutions that will invest in the country and help rebuild everything damaged during the war. Maria believes:

Our story should be a story of success: a country that faced so many obstacles went through so many dark pages in history, and still managed to survive, become influential, create great conditions for all its citizens

Some are also trying to be more realistic and predict the problems Ukrainian society can face after the war that we will have to deal with. The first issue mentioned is the demographic problems, as many people were killed and also many people evacuated abroad. Women think that the government should already work on developing projects on how they will encourage Ukrainians to move back to Ukraine from foreign countries. Lidiia said:

People already have jobs there, and their children go to school in those countries. They have built some life. Moreover, no matter how much we wish that Ukraine would become a developed country, it will not happen right after the war; our economy will struggle. So there should be some initiatives to encourage Ukrainians to leave the lives they built abroad and go back

Tetiana is also afraid that conservative groups will use the demographic problems to try to ban abortions and put pressure on women to have children:

Yes, we are focused more on saving the country now, and we even see the unity between the left and right sides of the population because we all have one goal now, but we should understand that the societal problems we had before 2022 did not disappear, and they will return after the war again

Another worry that Diana introduced is how to deal with the different experiences of Ukrainians during the war in a post-war society; in other words, how to ensure that Ukrainians who were in Ukraine throughout the whole war, Ukrainians who were abroad in evacuation, and Ukrainians who left at the beginning of the war but already came back do not start comparing who had it worse and who is a real patriot:

I hope we manage to keep this sense of unity, but unfortunately, we already see this gap of misunderstanding growing just because of differences of our current experiences

Many also worry about mental health issues that both civilians and soldiers can face en masse after the war. However, they will not get needed help because it is not common in our society to ask for help if you struggle emotionally. Also, there are not many help services available.

7.3. Their Role in a Post-war Ukrainian Society

Many hope to go back to the professional fields that they now put on pause because they are irrelevant, but they predict their expertise can be useful in post-war Ukraine; for example, Maryna, who is specialized in innovative technologies, hopes to be a part of the team that rebuilds houses with the help of 3D technologies. Oksana, who studied in a film academy, wishes to make a movie about women in her volunteering initiative group to ensure that their contribution is remembered:

I think we are so quick to forget individuals who were not doing anything very heroic but who were the backbone of society and the army, and I want us to avoid that

Many respondents plan to keep volunteering, just not in a war context anymore. Kira wants to volunteer on dismantling societal inequalities:

We tend to think of Ukraine of the future as of this magical perfect place, but unfortunately, we will still have sexism, prejudice against LGBT community, orphanage children and so on

Women think that they should not give up volunteering because they gained new skills and knowledge during the past year and cannot let them go to waste. They also hope that this wave of popularity of volunteering will not go down but will develop into a new culture where every individual feels a responsibility to do their part for the societal good. Kira said:

It is prestigious now to be a volunteer and the level of trust to volunteers is enormous. I hope we do not lose it

Some also think that their role as a citizen is to get prepared in case the war happens again.

Vira plans to apply for military school and become a junior sergeant in two years:

This time, I was not ready, so others had to step in to protect the country. In case it happens again, I want to be prepared to take up a more active role than only volunteering

This opinion is also shared by Alisa, who thinks that we cannot know if the country will need us as soldiers in the future, so it is better to be prepared in case we will need to protect ourselves again.

I also was curious to ask what kind of feelings the respondents have connected to the fact that they are carrying extra responsibilities now, and even in a post-war society, they still predict a need to continue their activism or volunteering work. The respondents do not have any resentment about it; most approach it just with an acceptance that this is what it means to be a Ukrainian now. Lidiia said:

It is definitely not the easiest time period to be Ukrainian, but also, when was it easy? Our ancestors had all the similar fights for freedom and independence too, and we now continue their battles with the hope that our children will not need to fight for the same things too

Nadiia also mentioned the significance of current times and that it makes them feel like they have the power to shape the future:

It is hard, it is really hard. But I am glad to be alive now, to witness all these historical changes, and to be an active part of those changes

7.4. Summary of future hopes

While being optimistic about the future, expecting that the war will be over in 2–3 years and then both Ukrainian businesses and foreign institutions will participate in rebuilding the

country, the respondents also recognize the challenges that post-war Ukraine will face. The respondents are particularly worried about healing civilians' and soldiers' emotional and psychical wounds. Women also have thoughts of what they want their post-war life to look like: some are thinking of changing their job and working in the third sector professionally or going for their dream jobs, but most of their plans are very down-to-earth like spending more time with their families and friends, have children, travel around Ukraine, have more free time. The interviewees expect to continue being an active part of civil society and continue volunteering in other sectors like women's or LGBT rights, as the problems Ukrainian society faces will not disappear together with the war.

8. Conclusion

Virginia Wolf (1938, p.197) famously said: “As a woman, I have no country.” She did not believe in female patriotism because states did not treat women as citizens of full value, so there was no foundation for women to love their country. The current Russian war in Ukraine, when women are an active force in their nation’s resistance, shows that there are cases when women feel affiliated with their country. My research aimed to explore the temporality of women’s experiences in Ukrainian civil society through concepts of national identity, gender, and war.

Analyzed literature suggests that civil society tends to mobilize when the country faces an external danger (Ramet, 1995, as cited in Wan&Vanderwerf, 2009). An overview of civil society during previous milestones in Ukraine’s history, like the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity, claims that while women were a major active part of the resistance, they did not receive much recognition for their efforts (Hrycak, 2007). Such invisibility of women as a resistant force is usually connected to the role that they are assigned by the nation’s projects: motherhood and representation of the nation’s honor (Yuval-Davis,2003). In Ukraine, the role of women in the nation’s project has always been accumulated in the image of “Berehynia,” which went a bit above traditional gender roles and opened up a path for women in nationalist movements (Kis, 2015). Zhurzhenko (2001) suggested that even though women were allowed to participate in nationalist movements primarily as caregivers, it still created more flexibility in keeping up with traditional gender dynamics and resulted in women being active members of civil society nowadays. As to evaluating the role of Ukrainian civil society, the literature proposed that international organizations supported Ukrainian CSOs through grants and theoretical training throughout the years of Ukraine’s independence (Kuts, 2006). However, it was mostly Ukrainian CSOs responding to the

challenges of the invasion during the first weeks of the full-scale war (UK Humanitarian Innovation Hub, 2022).

My research findings suggest that women activists feel more connected to the nation in times of crisis and are ready to be an active part of the resistance force. For many of my respondents, Russian aggression re-evaluated their national identity. Some went through this process in 2014; for some, it happened only in 2022. Respondents usually expressed their stronger feelings of belonging to the Ukrainian nation by switching to speaking Ukrainian instead of Russian in their daily lives and volunteering, which they see as their part in helping the country resist aggression.

This research also shows that participation in civil society during the war became a space where women exercised their agency, and they plan on continuing to do so after the war. The majority of the respondents mention how they cannot imagine their future without volunteering and just hope they will soon get a chance to volunteer for other needs of society not connected to the war. Interviewees also expressed readiness to work on combatting inequalities within the society and plan to use the skills they gained in CSOs to improve the situation with women's rights in Ukraine. While having expectations that international organizations and EU institutions will help to rebuild post-war Ukraine, the respondents still see themselves as active participants in that process and want to contribute either through volunteering or their professional skills.

Various actors usually share an opinion that any amount of external, international support is useless if there is no active civil society inside the country ready to stand up for their values and resist aggression. True changes come only from within. Ukrainian civil society proved more than once in its history that it had the capacity to lead and be the agents of change. The respondents see the civil society and Ukraine's government working as a united front now

that has a common goal to achieve. While they recognize that the civil society took over some of the responsibilities of the government, they do not see it as a negative thing and, on a contrary, believe that this is why Ukrainian resistance is so successful: no separation and internal disagreements at the time of the war. The consequences of such power distribution can only be seen in the future.

Even though literature (Jessee, 2011) warned on the limitations of doing research in such highly politicized context as during the ongoing armed conflict, I believe that it is essential to document narrations of Ukrainian women activists now. As we saw in introduction part, the ideological division, even in feminist communities, is growing, and Ukraine is becoming a case study rather than a heard voice at the decision table. This study gave space to Ukrainian women activists to tell their stories on their terms.

This thesis provides a snapshot of the positionality of Ukrainian women in civil society in 2023. Similar research is recommended to be carried out after the war to see how women activists' narrations might change. This research contributes to the field of studies of civil societies in a war context and women's participation in their nation's resistance. This thesis also expands on the possibilities of connections between the past, present, and future of civil society women activists and their re-evaluation of personal national identity when their country is facing external aggression.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Respondents

Appendix 2: Consent form

Appendix 3: Interview guide

Appendix 1

R1	Uliana	38 y/o	Kyiv	unregistered local initiative	making home-made food to send to frontlines
R2	Lidiia	24 y/o	lives in Kyiv, originally from Kovel	registered small NGO	delivering humanitarian aid to unoccupied territories
R3	Alisa	33 y/o	Kyiv	registered fund	delivering medical supplies
R4	Maria	25 y/o	Odesa	registered NGO	packing and sending humanitarian aid
R5	Nadia	26 y/o	Kharkiv, currently in Lviv as an internally displaced person	local unregistered initiative	sending medical supplies and protective gear to frontlines
R6	Oksana	23 y/o	Kaniv	registered small NGO	organizing fundraising events
R7	Polina	21 y/o	Kyiv, currently in Ternopil as an internally displaced person	local unregistered initiative	making candles and camouflage nets
R8	Tetiana	23 y/o	Lviv	unregistered local initiative	assisting internally displaced people
R9	Maryna	30 y/o	Kramatorsk, lives in Chernihiv as an internally displaced person since 2014	governmental organization	evacuation of civilians
R10	Diana	23 y/o	lives in Kyiv, originally from Poltava region	NGO	sending medical and hygiene supplies to female soldiers
R11	Vira	22 y/o	Kharkiv	NGO	humanitarian aid
R12	Kira	29 y/o	Sumy	registered charity fund	humanitarian aid, rebuilding destroyed houses

Appendix 2

Dear (name of the interviewee):

Please consider participating in a study regarding your volunteering experience in Ukraine. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate in the study and, if you do decide to participate, you may stop at any time. There will be no consequences for deciding not to participate or for deciding to stop participation in the study.

Participation in this study involves minimal risk. The interview might include personal or sensitive information. Please, feel free to skip any of them if you are uncomfortable with sharing that information.

If you agree to participate in this study, you give your consent:

- For the interview to be recorded for further transcribing purposes
- For the data from the interview to be used while writing an MA thesis
- For quoting you directly in the thesis with your name anonymized
- For the thesis to be available publicly

All video and audio materials will be destroyed by June 30th, 2023.

Appendix 3

1. Please, describe your life before the start of the full-scale invasion.
2. Tell me, please, about your current volunteering experience. How did you find it?
What is your role there?
3. Describe the mission of this NGO/initiative as you understand it.
4. Why did you decide to volunteer overall? Why with this NGO/initiative specifically?
5. What was the reaction of your family to you staying in the country and volunteering?
How about your friends?
6. How would you evaluate a role of Ukrainian civil society during the current war?
What is the role of the international organizations in Ukraine now?
7. How do you define yourself nationality wise? What is the role of your national identity in your life? What influenced your current attitude towards your national identity?
8. Have you ever volunteered before the full-scale invasion? If yes, where and what was your role?
9. What does it mean to you to be a Ukrainian woman?
10. How do you imagine your future?
11. How do you imagine future of Ukraine?
12. Where do you see yourself after the war is over?
13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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