Lyubit' Ukrayinu! Love Ukraine!

Why Americans who Sojourned in Ukraine are Committed to its Nationhood

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Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned, Cortney Copeland, candidate for the MA degree in Nationalism Studies, declare herewith that the present thesis titled "*Lyubit' Ukrayinu!* Love Ukraine! - Why Americans who Sojourned in Ukraine are Committed to its Nationhood" is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 6 June 2025

Cortney Copeland

Abstract

This thesis is a qualitative study about why and how people support a nation other than their own. Specifically, it explores the motivations of Americans who make sustained personal efforts to support Ukraine against Russia's full-scale invasion, with particular attention to the impact of prior sojourn in Ukraine, and how attachments developed during sojourn shape and are shaped by the pain and trauma of war. Such examination of transnational attachments has rarely been applied to sojourners beyond questions of individual identity, and sojourners have rarely been considered in studies of transnational involvement in nation-building or conflict. This study begins to address that gap. Through interviews with fifteen Americans who spent time in Ukraine as international development volunteers, and a comparison group of three Americans with no prior sojourn, this study takes a relational-processual approach to examine how connectedness and belonging emerge between people and nation and intensify in response to trauma. Findings indicate that sojourning can cultivate lasting transnational connectedness, and that relational setting is important to this process. Close social ties and community-focused work in the nation-building environment of newly independent Ukraine generated connectedness with Ukraine that is noted among former sojourners, but not other American supporters. It has made Russia's invasion feel personal and immediate for many, and driven processes of collective action that are readily facilitated by sojourn-influenced mobilizing structures and practices. Through such action, returned sojourners and other Americans alike seek not only to ease suffering, but to support Ukraine's sovereign nationhood.

Acknowledgements

My acknowledgements go first and foremost to all the people I have met through my time in Ukraine and afterward. You have so much to offer the world, and your efforts to sustain care, joy, and dignity in unimaginable circumstances are a defining lesson of my life. I also send my care to peers worldwide whose careers or volunteer service have been negatively impacted by unsettling US policy changes in 2025. May you still find ways to do good.

Special thanks go to everyone willing to share your stories through the interviews that are the basis of this research. The fact that there were more willing interviewees than I could speak with attests to your openness, sense of community, and willingness to step up and contribute.

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My studies would not have been possible without scholarship support from the Rotary Club of Fair Oaks and Rotary Club Vienna Connect. Thank you!

Finally, I must credit poet Volodymyr Sosiura for a portion of my thesis title. After going through many working titles, it became overwhelmingly clear that the defining theme is love.

Любіть Україну, як сонце, любіть,
як вітер, і трави, і води…
В годину щасливу і в радості мить,
любіть у годину негоди

"Любіть Україну" -
Володимир Сосюра, 1944

Love Ukraine, love like the sun,
like the wind, like grasses, like waters...
When you are happy, in a moment of joy,
love when your heart's full of sorrows

"Love Ukraine" -
Volodymyr Sosiura, 1944
Translation by Yuliia Lobchuk

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Introduction

Position Statement: About the Researcher

It is perhaps fair to say that most academic research is colored by personal experience, although this is not always stated. I find it important to introduce myself before introducing my research, because this thesis is focused on a group to which I belong, and motivated by curiosity about events that altered my life and the lives of people around me.

I served in the US Peace Corps in Ukraine several years into the war in the Donbas region, but before the full-scale invasion by Russia. Once back in the US, I became head of a grassroots organization of fellow returned volunteers and helped lead our response to the full-scale invasion. In this capacity, I witnessed how hundreds of people rapidly mobilized and then sustained actions for years, on top of other life demands. I did not yet have a formal research question, but I wondered what it meant for Ukraine, and for the USA, that so many Americans were carrying Ukraine in their hearts and minds. That wondering drove me to graduate school.

Academic research allegedly strives for objectivity, which is impossible in my situation. I am researching the motivations of people who support causes in which I have held visible leadership roles. Even if I can mitigate how this influences my work, it affects how people respond to me. What I can provide instead of objectivity is transparency. I see value in the challenge of studying things so close to us that we cannot be objective. My own subjectivity has given me earnest questions and the motivation to investigate them. In the Methodology section I discuss steps taken to ensure this research is not overly limited by my own perspective and assumptions. Out of respect for scholarly standards and especially for the people in whose stories I have sought insight, I have aimed to conduct this work with integrity and an open mind.

A Brief Orientation

The year is 2022. In a flurry of messages and social media posts, a grassroots network of American volunteers discusses export limitations on bulletproof vests. Somebody wants to send one to a former student in Ukraine, where Russia's invasion is the largest ground war in Europe since World War II. Some volunteers know one another, but many have never met. Their largely informal network is built on a shared history of previously serving in the US Peace Corps, a government volunteering program that, from 1992 until the pandemic evacuation in 2020, sent more than 3400 US citizens to Ukraine for assignments in English language education, youth development, HIV/AIDS prevention, and community economic development.[1] Sometimes these Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) note the irony of their situation: after spending years "promoting world peace and friendship," they are equipping friends for war.[2] They punctuate messages with Ukrainian flag emojis and sign off with "*Slava Ukrayini*!" ("Glory to Ukraine!") before turning their attention to work and family obligations. In the years ahead, they will spend countless hours and dollars on efforts ranging from procuring tourniquets, to lobbying Congress, to educating fellow Americans about the Ukrainian origins of a popular Christmas carol.

What motivates these American citizens of diverse backgrounds to devote time, money, and effort to a foreign country? Questions of why and how national attachments and solidarity emerge at all are core to nationalism studies. Some people may live in a country and develop minimal attachments; others may feel profoundly connected to a place they have never been. Transnational attachments have been extensively studied among immigrants and diaspora

[1] Peace Corps Ukraine, "Peace Corps Ukraine Annual Report 2021-2022" (Peace Corps Ukraine, 2023), https://files.peacecorps.gov/documents/AR_2021-22_English.pdf.

[2] The mission statement of the US Peace Corps is "To promote world peace and friendship through community-based development and intercultural understanding" Peace Corps, "Peace Corps Mission," accessed December 18, 2024, https://www.peacecorps.gov/what-we-do/our-mission/.

communities, but only minimally studied among sojourners - people who live abroad for a fixed, temporary period. Studies of sojourners have largely focused on peacetime and questions of individual identity or cultural adaptation (see Theoretical Framework). The collective mobilization of Ukraine RPCVs in response to war presents a relatively unresearched phenomenon among sojourners, though it has analogues in studies of migration and diaspora.

Research Aim

This study examines drivers of pro-Ukrainian solidarity actions among Americans, and whether a history of sojourning in Ukraine impacts their motivations. The key question is about the basis of their solidarity: whether former sojourners demonstrate particular attachments to Ukraine as a nation, versus more global humanitarian concern or US-centered motivations. The primary focus is on Americans with a history of sojourn in Ukraine as development volunteers, but Americans without such a history are included for comparative purposes.

This study investigates one main research question through several lines of inquiry. These lines of inquiry and the sub-questions they generate draw from sociological and social anthropological approaches to nationalism and transnationalism, trauma and emotion in politics, and social movements. These are discussed further in the Theoretical Framework chapter.

- Research Question: Why have so many Ukraine RPCVs mobilized and continued to support Ukrainian causes in response to military invasion by Russia? What drives their solidarity, and is it different for people who have not sojourned in Ukraine?

Line of inquiry 1: Belonging and Connectedness in Transnational Social Fields

- Sub-question: How do the relational setting and emotional experiences of volunteering in Ukraine, particularly given its active post-independence nation building, drive solidarity through feelings of connectedness and belonging?

- Counterpoint: Are solidarity actions driven not by connectedness with Ukraine, but rather by general moral sensibilities and/or cosmopolitan notions of the USA?

Line of inquiry 2: Trauma and Collective Action

- Sub-question: What is the role of trauma (if any) in collective mobilization among Ukraine RPCVs, and does it differ in comparison to Americans with no sojourn history?
- Counterpoint: Are RPCV responses to the invasion in Ukraine *not* uniquely impacted by trauma, and rather similar to responses to other suffering covered by mass media?

Through the questions above, this study aims to better understand transnational attachments in an understudied internationally mobile population. Research on transnational belonging and mobilization indicates that triggering events can activate relatively passive transnational ties into more active solidarity.[3,4] While this phenomenon has largely been approached in terms of migration and diaspora, this study examines it among sojourners whose time in a newly independent country could make national attachments especially salient.

The chapters of this thesis include Context, Theory, Methodology, Analysis, and Conclusion. Context provides some understanding of Peace Corps Volunteers' activities in Ukraine. Theory examines how they might develop attachments to Ukraine, emotional impacts of witnessing war, and drivers of collective action. Methodology explains the selected qualitative approach and sampling. The Analysis and Conclusion present empirical and theoretical findings with evidence from interview content analysis structured by the two lines of inquiry.

[3] Levitt and Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity."
[4] Sökefeld, "Mobilizing in Transnational Space," July 2006.

Context

Peace Corps

The Basics about Peace Corps

The Peace Corps is an international volunteer program operated by the US federal government. It was established by President John F. Kennedy in 1961 after he introduced the idea in a campaign speech.[5] Since then, Peace Corps has had a varying portfolio of partner countries based on political, economic, and security factors. The agency was operating in more than sixty countries in early 2025,[6] and has had programs in 144 countries. Programs cover six sectors: Agriculture, Community Economic Development, Education, Environment, Health, and Youth in Development.[7] The agency's mission is, "To promote world peace and friendship through community-based development and intercultural understanding," and it has three goals:

1. *To help the countries interested in meeting their need for trained people.*
2. *To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.*
3. *To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.*

Peace Corps Volunteers are selected through a competitive application, interview, and medical and background screening process. While application procedures have changed over time, as of spring 2025 applicants can express country and sector preferences. They must be US citizens (born or naturalized) over the age of eighteen. To avoid spying concerns, people who have worked for intelligence agencies are either not allowed to serve or subject to restrictions.

[5] "JFK's University of Michigan Speech & the Peace Corps," accessed May 18, 2025, https://www.peacecorps.gov/about-the-agency/history/founding-moment/.
[6] This number is declining at the time of writing due to widespread cuts to US government programs, as well as some security-related program closures. The rapidly changing situation makes it difficult to provide an exact count.
[7] "Peace Corps," accessed May 18, 2025, https://www.peacecorps.gov/.

Military veterans are allowed.[8] Most placements require a university degree. Volunteers range in age from their twenties to their eighties and include recent graduates, mid-career professionals, and retirees. Overall, about 240,000 people have served since Peace Corps was established.[9]

Peace Corps' goals and structure encourage volunteer integration in the host country. Volunteers are expected to abide by Ten Core Expectations that emphasize relationship building, community integration, safety, collaboration, and intercultural learning (see Appendix A). The standard assignment entails three months of language, cultural, and technical training followed by two years of service in an assigned location. There are also shorter Peace Corps Response assignments, but this thesis is limited to the standard format. Volunteers may extend their service or apply for a Response assignment to stay longer. After completing initial training together, volunteers are dispersed to host communities that range from regional urban centers to remote villages. Most live with a host family before renting their own housing, although the length of the host family stay varies. They receive a living stipend intended to support "a modest life in their country of service" that is "at a level similar to people in their community."[10] Peace Corps provides healthcare, and evacuates volunteers in cases of severe disaster or unrest.

Research Pertaining to Peace Corps

Research about Peace Corps spans multiple decades and disciplinary fields. Only a limited slice is relevant to the present study. Ample research examines the history, goals, strategies, and effectiveness of Peace Corps as an institution, its interaction with foreign policy,

[8] "Eligibility and Core Expectations for Peace Corps Applicants," accessed May 18, 2025, https://www.peacecorps.gov/how-to-apply/preparing-to-apply/eligibility-and-core-expectations/.
[9] "Peace Corps Facts and Figures," accessed May 18, 2025, https://www.peacecorps.gov/what-we-do/our-mission/facts-and-figures/.
[10] Justin Tabor, "How Much Are Peace Corps Volunteers Paid?," peacecorps.gov - An official website of the United States government, *Peace Corps Blog* (blog), September 1, 2021, https://www.peacecorps.gov/connect/blog/how-much-are-peace-corps-volunteers-paid/.

and impact on other volunteering programs worldwide.[11,12,13] Additional research examines Peace Corps discourse and marketing.[14] Implementation-focused studies consider topics like training, well-being, and program impacts.[15,16,17] Critical studies examine neocolonial dimensions, gender, and power dynamics in Peace Corps.[18,19] The most relevant research considers identity shifts in volunteers, and is discussed further in the Theoretical Framework.

Peace Corps in Ukraine

Ukraine was among many eastern European, central Asian, and Caucasian countries where Peace Corps established programs shortly after independence. Peace Corps' presence aligned with US foreign policy of supporting transitions to democratic governance and market economies in formerly communist countries.[20] Ukraine was the first post-Soviet country to open a Peace Corps program in 1992,[21] and before the 2020 pandemic evacuation was the largest post in terms of volunteers present. The earliest edition of the Peace Corps Ukraine country page available through the WayBackMachine internet archive (1996) includes a brief review of Ukrainian history from Kyivan Rus' through independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, touching on events like attempts at Ukrainian autonomy following the end of the Russian and

[11] Inton-Campbell, "Putting Peace Back Into the Peace Corps."
[12] Palmer, Bempong Nyantakyi, and Fullerton, "The US Peace Corps as a Public Diplomacy Strategy."
[13] Cobbs, "Decolonization, the Cold War, and the Foreign Policy of the Peace Corps."
[14] Melillo, "Democracy's Adventure Hero on a New Frontier."
[15] Jacobson, "Putting It Gently."
[16] Olsen, "Effective Cross-National Respectful Partnerships."
[17] Rostam-Kolayi, "The New Frontier Meets the White Revolution."
[18] Kallman, "The 'Male' Privilege of White Women, the 'White' Privilege of Black Women, and Vulnerability to Violence."
[19] Wirth, "The Creation of a Postcolonial Subject."
[20] "Opening a New Frontier: The Peace Corps Sets up Shop in Eastern Europe," *Newsweek*, January 27, 1992, https://research.ebsco.com/c/h5nqcz/viewer/html/cph2acxaq5?route=details.
[21] "Peace Corps | Learn About Peace Corps | Where Does Peace Corps Work? | Eastern Europe and Central Asia | Ukraine," October 20, 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20041020003024/http://peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=learn.wherepc.easteurope.ukraine.

Hapsburg Empires, forced collectivization and famine, the deportation of Crimean Tatars under Stalin and later transfer of Crimea to Ukraine, the Chornobyl nuclear disaster, and economic struggles following independence. The 1996 backgrounder states that, "despite its necessary dependence upon Russia, both economically and politically, Ukraine is actively promoting its statehood."[22] Later page versions from the mid-2000s emphasize Ukraine's "steps toward representative democracy, political pluralism, and a free-market economy" and list projects in business development, English language education, and environmental initiatives.[23] Project sectors since the 2013-2014 Revolution of Dignity include Community Economic Development, Education, and Youth in Development, and descriptions emphasize institutional capacity development, cooperation and information exchange, organizational sustainability, and integration into the global community. From 2017 through early 2025 the page had information about cross-cultural considerations, but this information was removed in 2025 due to an Executive Order prohibiting diversity, equity, and inclusion-related content.[24]

Volunteers were evacuated from Ukraine in 2014 after Russia's annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of war in the Donbas region, although the program resumed in 2015 and some evacuated volunteers returned. Peace Corps operations were geographically restricted to avoid conflict zones, but Ukraine again became the largest Peace Corps post until the 2020 evacuation. Programs set to resume in 2022 were cancelled due to Russia's invasion. As of 2025, there are no Peace Corps Volunteers physically in Ukraine, but there is a Virtual Service Pilot Program.

[22] "Peace Corps Ukraine," October 18, 1996, https://web.archive.org/web/19961018033416/http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/io/ecam/Ukraine.html.
[23] "Peace Corps | Learn About Peace Corps | Where Does Peace Corps Work?"
[24] Trump, Executive Order 14151: Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing.

Returned Peace Corps Volunteers

As indicated by the third Peace Corps goal and tenth Core Expectation, people who serve as Peace Corps Volunteers are encouraged to continue supporting the Peace Corps mission after finishing service. They are designated as "Returned Peace Corps Volunteers" (RPCVs), a term used formally by the Peace Corps and incorporated into the names of nongovernmental entities such as RPCV membership organizations. While the term RPCV originates in and is used by Peace Corps, designation as an RPCV does not indicate a formal relationship with the Peace Corps as a government agency. The commitment among RPCVs to share intercultural knowledge with people in the USA after service is mostly implied and informal, although it receives institutional support. Peace Corps maintains an office focused on RPCVs and "Third Goal" activities that promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans. Additionally, there exists a network of RPCV associations ranging from unincorporated groups who organize occasional reunions, to registered nonprofit organizations. Many such groups are affiliates of the National Peace Corps Association, which categorizes them into five types:

- Affinity groups (ex: LGBTQI+ RPCVs, Women of Peace Corps Legacy)
- Cause-Related groups (ex: Peace Corps Community for Refugees)
- Country of Service groups (Ex: RPCV Alliance for Ukraine, Friends of Moldova)
- Regional groups (Ex: Northern California Peace Corps Association)
- Workplace groups (Ex: RPCVs & Friends at USDA

Ukraine RPCVs established a Country of Service organization in 2018, the RPCV Alliance for Ukraine, which remains active as of 2025 and states its mission as being, "to empower an international network of people, agencies, and organizations dedicated to fostering a self-determined and globally-connected Ukraine by enacting the shared values of the Peace

Corps community."[25] The Alliance expanded significantly after Russia's full-scale invasion,[26] part of a larger grassroots mobilization. As one RPCV described in a radio interview:

> *Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24th, and that very same day a new Peace Corps alumni page was triggered to help provide crisis support however we could to Ukrainians. There are about 1400 Peace Corps Volunteers now that go to that page every day and do whatever they can.*[27]

As of spring 2025, the page started in 2022 is still active. Several Ukraine RPCVs have established NGOs for direct aid efforts, and the RPCV Alliance for Ukraine launched a grants program to fund projects by teams of Ukraine RPCVs and their Ukrainian colleagues. Several RPCVs in this study were planning fundraisers and trips to Ukraine at the time of interviewing.

Ukraine in US Politics and Civil Society

This is not a study about US-Ukraine relations or Ukrainian advocacy in the US. However, background information is helpful for understanding the ways Americans encounter and contextualize Ukrainian issues. After US military intelligence indicated Russia might invade, the buildup of Russian troops along Ukraine's borders and the invasion itself were covered in mainstream news.[28] US Congress, led by a Democratic Party majority, passed aid packages for Ukraine with bipartisan support, and President Joe Biden initiated the Uniting for Ukraine

[25] RPCV Alliance for Ukraine, "Mission & Goals."
[26] RPCV Alliance for Ukraine, "2022 Annual Report."
[27] "Former Peace Corps Volunteers in Ukraine Mobilize for Support in Minnesota," Interview, *Minnesota Now with Nina Moini* (MPR News, May 4, 2022), https://www.mprnews.org/episode/2022/05/04/former-peace-corps-volunteers-in-ukraine-mobilize-for-support-in-minnesota.
[28] Illustrative examples: Patrick Reevell, "Russia's Buildup of Troops near Ukraine Sparks Fears of Attack: Analysis," *ABC News* November 26, 2021, https://abcnews.go.com/International/russias-buildup-troops-ukraine-sparks-fears-attack-analysis/story?id=81370345; Humerya Pamuk and Simon Lewis, "U.S. Says 'all Options' on the Table over Russian Troop Buildup near Ukraine | Reuters," *Reuters*, November 26, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/us-state-dept-says-all-options-table-over-russian-troop-build-up-near-ukraine-2021-11-26/; Vladimir Isachenkov et al., "Russia Attacks Ukraine as Defiant Putin Warns US, NATO," *AP News*, February 24, 2022, https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-europe-russia-moscow-kyiv-626a8c5ec22217bacb24ece60fac4fe1.

program to admit Ukrainians to the US with temporary legal status.[29] Congressional leadership changed when the November 2022 elections brought in a Republican majority. By late 2023, support for Ukraine was contentious in Congress, which delayed voting on proposed aid for several months.[30] The 2024 election of Republican Donald Trump marked a further political shift. In the first months of his presidency, the US briefly paused intelligence sharing with Ukraine, reduced defense and humanitarian support globally, including in Ukraine, and initiated ceasefire discussions between Ukraine and Russia that some analysts view as favorable to Russia.[31] Support for Ukraine has since become part of opposition to the Trump administration.

A mix of legacy Ukrainian diaspora organizations and newer groups formed since 2014 routinely organize events and advocate for US support for Ukraine. After the full-scale invasion, many joined the new American Coalition for Ukraine, which launched the Ukraine Action Summit to regularly organize constituent lobbying in Congress. There also exist numerous US-Ukraine sister city relationships. Some longstanding sister city partnerships date to before Ukraine's independence, while numerous new ones were established following Russia's 2022 invasion.[32] Like Peace Corps, sister city programs are a way that Americans without a family connection to Ukraine become involved in Ukrainian issues.

[29] American Immigration Council, "An Overview of the 'Uniting for Ukraine' Program."
[30] Zengerle and Cowan, "US Congress Passes Ukraine Aid after Months of Delay | Reuters."
[31] Illustrative examples: Alexandra Prokopenko, "Moscow Has Everything to Gain and Little to Lose From Black Sea Ceasefire" (Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, March 28, 2025), https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/03/usa-russia-ukraine-deal?lang=en; Alexander Smith, "Trump's Black Sea Truce Plan Is a 'gift to Russia' That Risks Undermining Sanctions, Analysts Warn," *NBC News*, March 26, 2025, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/trump-black-sea-russia-ukraine-putin-ceasefire-zelenskyy-europe-deal-rcna198132.
[32] For example: Sacramento-Sumy (Where is Sumy, Ukraine? It's Sacramento's newest sister city | Sacramento Bee), Vinnytsia-Birmingham (Vinnytsia, Ukraine - Birmingham Sister Cities), Hoboken-Melitopol (City of Hoboken and City of Melitopol Ukraine unite as sister cities).

Theoretical Framework

Taking a Relational-Processual Approach to Transnational Solidarity

This thesis originates from an empirical observation that seems expected, yet contradicts prior studies. Since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, hundreds of Ukraine RPCVs have connected with one another and with Ukrainian contacts to engage in activities like fundraising, supply delivery, education and advocacy, and direct assistance for people displaced by war. These sustained efforts require time, money, energy, and sometimes personal risk. While it may seem natural to help people in a place where one previously lived, albeit temporarily, Ukraine RPCVs' intense ongoing involvement with their country of service counters prior research on international development volunteers, which has found minimal transnational volunteer activity and declining transnational self-identification among those who return home after serving abroad.[33,34] Persistent transnational engagement has, however, been extensively studied among immigrants and diaspora communities, particularly with relation to nationalism and conflict.[35,36,37] In the context of Russian leaders denying Ukraine's nationhood to justify a war,[38] it is worth applying such scholarship to sojourners who spent time in Ukraine.

Studies of people who stay involved with a nation they are not living in have yielded influential ideas like "long-distance nationalism"[39] and "homeland orientation."[40] These concepts partially describe actions observable among Ukraine RPCVs, but definitionally exclude them and

[33]Kallman, "Dimensions of Cosmopolitanism."
[34]Watson, "Three Bases of Identity in Global Context."
[35] Anderson, *Long-Distance Nationalism*.
[36] Checkel, *Transnational Dynamics of Civil War*.
[37] Collyer, "Diasporas and Transnational Citizenship."
[38]Baker, "Putin Denies Planning to Revive the Russian Empire after Declaring That Ukraine Is Not a Real Country and Sending Troops There."
[39]Anderson, *Long-Distance Nationalism*.
[40]Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora."

pose theoretical challenges. As articulated by Anderson, long-distance nationalism refers to actions by immigrants and diaspora community members like advocating for desired policies in or toward their country of origin, sending material support (especially to social or political causes), engaging in nationalist discourse online, etc.[41] While Ukraine RPCVs have done similar things, Anderson's theory that long-distance nationalism stems from inadequate post-migration integration does not apply to these diverse US citizens who volunteered to represent the USA abroad in a national service program. Furthermore, Ukraine RPCVs who visit and even live in Ukraine during wartime challenge Anderson's assertion that long-distance nationalism requires insulation from the consequences of nationalist movements. His theoretical explanation is definitionally limited to people with a migration background, and imbued with outdated normative ideals of assimilation and culturally homogenous nations.

In comparison, Brubaker's conceptualization of "homeland orientation" as a defining characteristic of diaspora leaves room for flexible understandings of transnational attachments not strictly tied to migration history. His suggestion that diaspora is a "stance" or "claim" aligns with social movement-based theories of diaspora,[42] and opens the door to analyzing Ukraine RPCVs' active orientation toward Ukraine as such. However, Brubaker still includes dispersion from a putative homeland as a defining characteristic of diaspora, and acknowledges that removing heritage and history from definitions of diaspora do a disservice to research and communities for which that heritage and history is deeply important.[43] Most Ukraine RPCVs lack Ukrainian heritage, and are hesitant to apply the label of diaspora to themselves. Thus, while they maintain an orientation toward Ukraine after sojourning there, it is theoretically problematic

[41] Anderson, *Long-Distance Nationalism*.
[42] Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora."
[43] Sökefeld, "Mobilizing in Transnational Space," July 2006.

to treat Ukraine as their putative homeland or rely on "homeland orientation" to explain their actions. However, conceptualizations of diaspora as a stance[44] or social movement[45] pave the way for studying solidarity grounded in something akin to homeland orientation, but on the basis of attachments developed through sojourn rather than origin.

Given that long-distance nationalism and homeland orientation do not fully fit the case at hand, this study instead considers Ukraine RPCVs as engaging in transnational and/or international solidarity. This approach facilitates comparison between Ukraine RPCVs and Americans who do not have a history of sojourn but who also show solidarity. Solidarity is often studied as "solidarity actions" or "solidarity practices" like advocacy, direct aid, fundraising, and information sharing.[46] There are varying conceptualizations of solidarity that crosses national borders, with transnational solidarity often referring to global grassroots movements that decenter nation-states,[47,48,49] and international solidarity to institutionalized, state-centered actions like those taken by the United Nations.[50] Some scholars use terms interchangeably, including in discussions of transnational support for nationalist causes.[51] The present study draws on transnationalist concepts to explore the experiences and motivations for grassroots solidarity, while acknowledging the centrality of nation-states in a war over national sovereignty.

Theoretical insights from studies of nationalism, migration, and diaspora enable exploring solidarity in ways not bound to notions of "group" or "community" employed in the

[44] Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora."
[45] Sökefeld, "Mobilizing in Transnational Space," July 2006.
[46] Zaviršek, "Transnational Solidarity in Rough Times."
[47] Çağatay, "'If Women Stop, the World Stops.'"
[48] Chaplain, "Storytelling and Worldmaking Climate Justice Futures."
[49] Giliberti and Queirolo Palmas, "Solidarities in Transit on the French–Italian Border."
[50] For example, the UN has an Independent Expert on International Solidarity whose work largely focuses on human rights as a basis for international cooperation and consensus-building: https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/ie-international-solidarity
[51] Hodgkinson, "Politics on Liberation's Frontiers."

term's most basic definitions. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines solidarity as, "support by one person or group of people for another because they share feelings, opinions, aims, etc."[52] and the main Oxford English Dictionary uses, "The fact or quality, on the part of communities, etc., of being perfectly united or at one in some respect, esp. in interests, sympathies, or aspirations."[53] The present research does not assume that groups materially exist, and therefore does not rely on individual or group identity to explain solidarity (an inspiration from Brubaker).[54] This study instead focuses on cognitive-affective (thinking and feeling) aspects that define solidarity: support, shared feelings and sympathies, aligned aims and aspirations. These are notably processes and actions rather than stable, material phenomena.

Abandoning "identity" marks a departure from prior research on sojourners, which typically use identity as what Brubaker and Cooper call a "category of analysis"[55] to explore whether the national, transnational, and/or cosmopolitan identities people assign to themselves change after sojourning abroad. Watson observes that development volunteers can simultaneously have transnational and national identities, although transnationalism manifests more in social relationships than individual identity.[56] Kallman finds that Peace Corps Volunteers demonstrate divergent post-sojourn identity shifts with regards to the USA, becoming either "patriotic cosmopolitans" or "disaffected cosmopolitans."[57] However, identity as an analytical concept does not lend itself to explaining motivations and actions. Watson notes that analyzing social roles and networks is a better way to capture how people actually experience

[52] "Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at Oxford Learner's Dictionaries | Find Meanings and Definitions of Words," accessed May 5, 2025, https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english.
[53] "Oxford English Dictionary," accessed May 5, 2025, https://www.oed.com/?tl=true.
[54] Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*.
[55] Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity.'"
[56] Watson, "Three Bases of Identity in Global Context."
[57] Kallman, "Dimensions of Cosmopolitanism," 196–97.

transnationalism, rather group identity-based concepts. She suggests future research should consider social aspects of transnationalism, including the extensiveness and depth of social relationships.[58] The present study builds on that advice by centering social spheres and relational setting, which, as analytical tools, are better equipped to explore motivations and actions, and also easier to compare between Americans with and without a history of sojourn.

The present research takes to heart Brubaker's and Cooper's call to move beyond the "hopelessly ambiguous" concept of identity instead examine "multiple forms and degrees of commonality and connectedness" that emerge and fluctuate in changing contexts.[59] The remaining sections of this chapter address relational-processual concepts as alternatives to "identity." A relational-processual approach enables nuanced examination of social and emotional processes as they occur in different relational settings to distinguish sojourning from other kinds of transnational experiences and consider multiple possible bases for solidarity.

Research Objective and Questions

As indicated in the introduction, this study uses several lines of inquiry to investigate an overarching research question: Why have so many Ukraine RPCVs mobilized and continued to support Ukrainian causes in response to the military invasion by Russia? What drives their solidarity, and is it different from drivers for people who have not sojourned in Ukraine?

This study begins with two theory-based lines of inquiry that form a framework to guide data collection and analysis. Based on existing theory, possible drivers of the transnational solidarity examined in this study are: 1. transnational belonging and connectedness to Ukraine developed during an immersive sojourn in a relational setting of nation building; 2. the socio-

[58] Watson, "Three Bases of Identity in Global Context," 165–66.
[59] Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity.'"

emotional impacts of traumatic events, along with existing mobilizing structures and practices, in driving collective action. Each line of inquiry includes both a guiding question and a counterpoint to account for possible alternative explanations. Methods designed to pursue these lines of inquiry guide the qualitative approach of this study, while additional explanations not envisioned in this theoretical framework may surface as well.

Line of inquiry 1: Belonging and Connectedness in a Transnational Relational Setting

Line of Inquiry 1 considers how sojourning may engender in American volunteers feelings of belonging and connectedness to Ukraine through an affectively charged national habitus and transnational social field.[60] These mechanisms may also occur to a lesser degree for people who have not sojourned in Ukraine, but who interact with Ukrainian diasporans, immigrants, and refugees or are involved in US-Ukraine transnational organizations.

Sojourning as a Peace Corps Volunteer is perhaps more likely than other kinds of sojourn to cultivate strong attachments to people, places, and even a nation, because of how such a sojourn shapes volunteers' relational settings (see Context for specifics of Peace Corps sojourns). Studies of sojourners have begun to contemplate the impact of factors like purpose and country of sojourn.[61,62] However, "sojourner" still relies primarily on the criterion of temporarily residing in a country[63] for enough time to "imply residency rather than a visit" (often taken to mean a year or more)[64] and encompasses such different people as international students, business expatriates, development workers, volunteers, and missionaries. While sojourners of all types may have some common experiences, the goals and daily interactions of a business executive in

[60] These terms are defined and cited in the subsequent paragraphs
[61] Colic-Peisker, "Free Floating in the Cosmopolis?"
[62] Watson, "Three Bases of Identity in Global Context."
[63] Sam and Berry, *The Cambridge Handbook of Acculturation Psychology*.
[64] Colic-Peisker, "Free Floating in the Cosmopolis?"

the capital of a global superpower differ from those of a volunteer in a rural part of a newly independent country. The present study therefore pays attention to volunteers' relational settings.

Peace Corps Volunteers in Ukraine lived and worked in relational settings especially conducive to generating attachment to Ukraine as a nation. A relational setting helps constitute what Heaney calls a "national habitus" - the combination of social, symbolic, cognitive, and emotional processes that generate feelings of national attachment and solidarity. For Heaney, "nationhood is something one feels and does" while embedded in a relational-historical matrix that informs how people act and who they understand themselves to be.[65] Heaney builds on Berezin's idea of nations as projects rather than fixed entities, and incorporates her concept of "communities of feeling"[66] along with Collins' "interaction rituals"[67] (being present with others while shared focus and emotional energy generate bonds). These ideas align with the understanding that nations are "joinable," as Brubaker articulates: depending on context, some nations can be joined in a "relatively short time."[68] As a newly independent nation undergoing systemic change punctuated with popular revolutions, Ukraine was likely joinable for volunteers. Their work in schools, local governments, and civil society organizations engaged them in building what Mazzuca and Munck call the "national state" (sense of shared nationhood) and "administrative state" (capacity to provide public goods).[69] Ukrainian organizations partnering with a US program likely shared a similar democratic, western-oriented national vision. This vision was amplified in mass events like the Orange Revolution and Revolution of Dignity, which some volunteers encountered directly, and others through stories and memorials. Peace

[65] Heaney, "Emotions and Nationalism."
[66] Berezin, "Secure States."
[67] Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*.
[68] Brubaker, "In the Name of the Nation," 122.
[69] Mazzuca and Munck, "State or Democracy First?" 1222.

Corps Volunteers stayed with host families, and Uehling's research in Ukraine notes how easily family loyalties can map onto national loyalties.[70] The relational setting in Ukraine thus matches what Heaney suggests is most potent for developing attachment to a nation:

> *if the relational setting within which one is embedded is characterized by strong devotion to a particular notion of nationhood, which is reinforced and reproduced by the consumption of its associated symbols and stories, and with attendance at concrete 'communities of feeling' at which emotional energy is circulating, then one is more likely to identify strongly with the nation.*[71]

While the concepts above explain how attachments develop *within nations*, studies of migration provide insight into how *transnational* emotional and social ties function across time and distance. In their transnational approach to mobility, Levitt and Glick Schiller conceptualize "being" and "belonging" in transnational social fields.[72] A social field includes interactions with individuals, groups, and institutions (not unlike Heaney's "relational setting"). A transnational social field spans national boundaries. A person's engagement in their social field might entail "being," "belonging," or both. "Being" refers to everyday interactions and practices that happen to cross borders. An American who congratulates a Ukrainian friend on their child's graduation is being in a transnational social field. However, "belonging" indicates conscious identification with others as a collective. An American who gets a tattoo of a Ukrainian national symbol and joins Ukrainian-led public demonstrations is, perhaps, showing belonging. Brubaker discusses identification and belonging with even further nuance by distinguishing individual self-understanding from collective social cohesion. The terms "self-understanding" - "*one's own* understanding of who one is" and "connectedness" - "the relational ties that link people,"[73] both

[70] Uehling, *Everyday War*, 97.
[71] Heaney, "Emotions and Nationalism."
[72] Levitt and Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity."
[73] Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" 18–19.

describe aspects of what Levitt and Glick Schiller call "belonging," and all of these concepts help explain the basis of transnational solidarity. The present study does not ask whether Americans support Ukraine due to an identity shift toward feeling Ukrainian, but rather examines self-understandings and feelings of connectedness that can constitute belonging.

Both Brubaker and Levitt and Glick Schiller note that events can trigger increased collective cohesion and solidarity, which is relevant to the present study's wartime context. According to Levitt and Glick-Schiller, crises as well as opportunities might drive people embedded in transnational social fields to move beyond casual being into conscious belonging. They furthermore hypothesize that, "someone who had access to a transnational way of belonging would be likely to act on it at some point in his or her life."[74] Brubaker likewise notes that, rather than assuming stable groups and identities, "treating groupness as variable and contingent rather than fixed and given, allows us to take account of – and, potentially, to account for – phases of extraordinary cohesion and moments of intensely felt collective solidarity."[75] Russia's invasion of Ukraine is precisely the kind of crisis that could catalyze a shift from being to belonging and "intensely felt collective solidarity" among Ukraine RPCVs and their Ukrainian friends and colleagues. The next line of inquiry further explores responses to trauma, even if experienced secondarily or from afar, as mechanisms for this shift.

Counterpoint: US-Centered rather than Ukraine-Centered Solidarity Motivations

While the theories referenced above point to the likelihood of Ukraine RPCVs developing an attachment to Ukraine that is sustained transnationally after returning to the US and potentially heightened during times of crisis, it is worth acknowledging the possibility that

[74] Levitt and Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity," 1011.
[75] Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 12.

supporting Ukraine against Russia could be driven by general moral sensibilities or US-centered attachments and self-understandings. Both Kallman and Watson find that some returned volunteers develop heightened identification with their home nation after serving abroad.[76,77] Motivations to support Ukraine that center things like a US-led international order, acting on US values, or meeting US strategic needs could also be present instead of or alongside a sense of connectedness to Ukraine and attachment to Ukraine as a nation.

Line of Inquiry 2: Trauma, Mobilizing Opportunities, and Collective Action

This line of inquiry considers pain and trauma not only to acknowledge the human impacts of war, but also to explain why and how crisis can intensify feelings of belonging and drive collective action. The understandings that inform this research come from Ahmed and Hutchison, respectively, who treat pain and trauma as complex interactions of sensation, emotion, and cognition that individuals experience in social context. Their approaches align with the socially embedded, relational-processual concepts described above, and enable a detailed exploration of the mechanisms by which people come together for action in moments of pain.

Ahmed lays out key ways that emotions, including pain, operate: emotions delineate the boundaries of individual and collective bodies; emotions are felt individually, but interpreted socially; and emotions generate points of attachment in addition to boundaries. Pain helps define the boundaries of bodies because it is experienced as an "impression" upon or even breaching of a body's surface.[78] The boundary between one's foot and the rest of the world becomes clear when one steps on a rock. Ahmed's concept of the "sociality of emotion," not unlike Heaney's "habitus," describes how emotions are given meaning in social context. A person experiencing a

[76] Kallman, "Dimensions of Cosmopolitanism."
[77] Watson, "Three Bases of Identity in Global Context."
[78] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Reprinted (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2010).

painful sensation has an emotional reaction to that pain and, perhaps, a socially constructed understanding of what it means and how to respond.[79] The person who steps on a rock may be angry because rocks are not supposed to be inside the house, and so the person tries to find out who violated this boundary. At the collective level, consider a person who feels emotional pain upon witnessing the burning down of the local public library. Their emotional response is shaped by what they know and feel about that library, libraries in general, and the responses of people around them. The burning of the library is experienced as damage to the body of the town, and a shared understanding of communal pain emerges that guides a response to heal this body. In a context of international war, such an incident may be felt as harm not only to the town body, but to the national body. The destruction of a library in Ukraine by a Russian airstrike occurs in a social context in which towns across the country have experienced similar events and developed a shared understanding that such attacks are attacks on Ukrainian culture and nationhood.

In addition to delineating boundaries, emotions orient a person in physical and social space and establish points of attachment – but these orientations and attachments can be cast into disarray by trauma. According to Ahmed, "What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place."[80] When feeling emotional pain in response to the destruction of a library, a person feels attachment to that library, and perhaps through it an attachment to their town and nation. This attachment helps situate the person in a social order they can navigate. However, trauma can disrupt this sense of order. Hutchison describes a traumatic event as something so shocking and terrifying that, "the meanings and attachments once taken as absolute and constitutive of one's identity are undermined, possibly

[79] Ahmed addresses existing debates about whether sensations, emotions, and thoughts are different things by considering these differences to be primarily analytical. In the present paper, the word "emotion" refers to the combined affective, cognitive, and sensory aspects of "feeling" something, as Ahmed considers them inseparable.
[80] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 11.

shattered."[81] As Ahmed describes, through emotions "subjects become *invested* in particular structures such that their demise is felt as a kind of living death."[82] The demise, or even threat of demise, of structures of meaning – including "nation" - can cause helplessness and disorientation, as if reality itself has been ruptured. Uehling describes war creating a feeling of "everyday sci-fi" where even the most mundane or familiar things become strange.[83] Traumatized people are no longer sure what to do or how to interpret what is happening.

Pain and trauma generate a paradox: they reveal the distances between people because they are incommunicable, yet they can help forge connectedness. According to Ahmed, people in pain want their pain witnessed even if it cannot fully be shared; and people who love those who are in pain, although they cannot themselves share that pain, are moved by it and want to respond.[84] Likewise, Hutchison describes how, "traumatized individuals often turn to a wider community [...] they tell of their trauma, seeking acknowledgement within a group or community that is able to understand or identify with their shock and pain"[85] People try to connect across the ruptures of trauma and build shared meaning where past meanings have been upended. In this state of "social dislocation," people experiencing and/or witnessing trauma may "rethink, and possibly reshape their attachments with others."[86] To connect this idea to Levitt and Glick-Schiller's work, this rethinking of attachments in response to trauma creates room for a person who was only casually "being" in a transnational social field to more actively take on "belonging." Furthermore, for both Hutchison and Ahmed, addressing pain requires bringing it

[81] Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma*, 2016, 41.
[82] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 12.son
[83] Uehling, *Everyday War*, 123.
[84] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 22.
[85] Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma*, 2016, 36.
[86] Hutchison, 51.

"into the realm of action."[87] Hutchison describes a process of developing, "both a personal and a publicly recognized meaning which can, in turn, furnish a sense of common purpose."[88] This common purpose does not rest upon having identical feelings or experiences of trauma, but rather upon what people build together in response to trauma. Ahmed says of pain that, "the impossibility of 'fellow feeling' is itself the confirmation of injury. The call of such pain, as a pain that cannot be shared through empathy [...] is a call for action, and a demand for collective politics."[89] Such an understanding of trauma and pain as drivers of solidarity returns to this paper's earlier assertion that solidarity does not necessarily entail being fully united with one another, but is rather feeling moved by and therefore connected to one another.

The ways people bring pain and trauma "into the realm of action" are driven by their attempts to construct meaning and shaped by enabling and constraining factors in the social environment. In his work on the formation and mobilization of diasporas, Sökefeld sums up the main aspects of social movement theory as, "three issues that govern social mobilization and that are conventionally labelled as *political opportunities*, *mobilizing structures and practices* and *framing.*"[90] Political opportunities are conditions that enable the rise of social movements, including the existence of grievances and an ability to articulate and address them through communications, organizations, etc. Mobilizing structures and practices include things like networks and platforms, and recognizable ways to organize widespread actions, such as letter campaigns and fundraising drives. Framing, which Sökefeld defines as a "common framework of

[87] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 39.
[88] Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma*, 2016, 36.
[89] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 39.
[90] Sökefeld, "Mobilizing in Transnational Space," July 2006, 5.

interpretation and representation,"[91] is comparable to what Ahmed and Hutchison describe as shared meaning, and is put into some form of communication to mobilize others toward action.

This line of inquiry into trauma and pain as solidarity drivers of is inspired by the informal observation of how many Ukraine RPCVs sought one another out not only to coordinate actions like evacuations, supply deliveries, and advocacy campaigns, but also to share painful moments like news about the deaths of friends or former students, fears when host family members could not be contacted, or collective shock at the destruction of places where many RPCVs spent time together. Drawing from the concepts described above, interviews conducted for this study explore distinctly transnational experience of trauma and pain related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as the structures and practices shaping mobilization in response.

While both Ahmed and Hutchison discuss the impact of witnessing trauma in addition to experiencing it directly, the nature of witnessing trauma transnationally is only partly addressed. Hutchison brings her study of trauma into the transnational realm by examining "long-distance trauma" as a driver for international aid and charitable donations. However, apart from briefly acknowledging that individuals' direct communications form part of disaster discourse, her analysis is limited to witnesses who lack prior connections with impacted people or places, and whose main exposure to trauma is via mass media. Her research does not consider trauma that occurs in physically distant places where people have close social and emotional ties. Therefore, the present study considers trauma in the "simultaneity" of a transnational social field. Levitt and Glick-Schiller note simultaneity as a key characteristic of transnationalism, citing Vertovec's observation about being "effectively both 'here' and 'there.'"[92] For people connected through

[91] Sökefeld, 270.
[92] Vertovec, "Transnationalism and Identity," 575.

prior sojourn, trauma witnessed in a distant place is not necessarily witnessed from a distance.

An additional area to develop theory around trauma relates to Hutchison's suggestion of a "politics of grief" as a way forward from traumatic events. She proposes accepting and working through trauma rather than memorializing and preserving it as a healthy response to events like terrorist attacks and civil conflicts, but acknowledges additional complexities in contexts of international war.[93] Understanding how to constructively grieve under ongoing aggression is beyond this study, but perhaps some preliminary insights are possible.

Counterpoint: Conventional Responses to Stories of Suffering

Both Ahmed and Hutchison examine how relaying painful and traumatic events in media can shape widely shared (and sometimes maladaptive or appropriative) public interpretations of those events. Although this study anticipates that connectedness and social ties make trauma, whether experienced directly or witnessed secondarily, a distinctly personal and compelling driver for RPCVs' solidarity with Ukraine, it is possible they could respond similarly to Russia's attacks compared to other conflicts or disasters abroad. It is likewise possible that non-RPCVs and RPCVs, who have likely viewed much of the same media coverage about Ukraine, will have similar responses, indicating that RPCV solidarity is *not* uniquely impacted by trauma.

Research Contributions

This thesis aims to empirically explore and theoretically build upon several areas of scholarship. Firstly, it addresses a need repeatedly expressed by scholars to better delineate different ways of living transnationally, exploring what is common while distinguishing between modes like migration, diaspora, sojourning, global social movements, etc.[94] This study takes on a

[93] Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma*, 2016, 258.
[94] In pondering the conceptual boundaries of diaspora, Cohen wonders how to "encompass new forms of mobility and displacement and the construction of new identities and subjectivities" ("Solid, Ductile and Liquid: Changing

piece of this endeavor by focusing on an under-conceptualized mode of transnationalism – sojourning – and examining how relational setting shapes sojourn's impacts. Furthermore, while literature exists about near-term impacts of sojourn, there is little research on long-term post-sojourn connections. Golbert works in this direction by acknowledging the roles returned sojourners play in diaspora communities by maintaining "a transnational perspective from home" and shaping transnational consciousness at the local level.[95] Understanding the motivations of returned sojourners also has practical implications. The National Peace Corps Association lists more than 50 county-of-service RPCV groups.[96] Comparable volunteering programs exist outside the US, and some diaspora birthright trips have similar formats.[97] Researchers considering how people act transnationally would be remiss to overlook these numerous and organized returned sojourners and areas of overlap or interaction between sojourn and diaspora.

Secondly, this research addresses aspects of transnational trauma not considered in Hutchison's "long-distance trauma," which is limited to people whose primary connection to faraway traumatic events is through media rather than personal ties or memories. Concepts like simultaneity can illuminate whether people who have sojourned in a place view traumatic events there differently than people who have not. Additionally, it would be remiss not to acknowledge that the subjects of this study are coping with an ongoing war with consequences that will likely be felt for decades. This research is an opportunity to learn from and reflect on the situation thus far, and in a sense may be a practice of working through trauma as much as it is an analysis.

Notions of Homeland and Home in Diaspora Studies," 127.) Vertovec proposes theorizing "a typology of transnationalisms and the conditions that affect them," ("Transnationalism and Identity," 576.) Clifford suggests comparing "maps of displacement and connection [...] on the basis of family resemblance, of shared elements." ("Diasporas," 306.)

[95] Golbert, "Transnational Orientations from Home," 717.

[96] National Peace Corps Association, "Directory."

[97] For example, Birthright Armenia incorporates host family stays, volunteering, and language study. "Birthright Armenia."

Methodological Approach

The present research is a qualitative study that relies on semi-structured interviews of Americans who, since 2022, have been actively involved in Ukrainian causes through volunteering, fundraising/donating, advocacy, or professional commitments. Since there is no comprehensive measure of the scale and volume of Americans' volunteering, donating, etc., and most individuals lack data about the extent of even their own activities, this study does not attempt to quantify or categorize subjects' involvement. It rather focuses on motivations and aims to investigate the underlying drivers of transnational solidarity through in-depth interviews with volunteers who are active in at least some way as gauged through initial recruitment.

The choice of semi-structured interviews is informed by general guidelines on qualitative research and specific recommendations from social movement theory. According to Ritchie et al.'s guidebook on qualitative research, individual interviews are more suitable than group discussions or participant observation for exploring complex processes like motivations and decisions. Interviews also work well for geographically dispersed study participants, as in the present study.[98] Social movement scholar Della Porta notes qualitative interviews are "particularly useful for understanding the sense that actors give their actions" and have advantages for analyzing both individual and social processes.[99] Semi-structured individual interviews were therefore deemed the most appropriate method for researching the motivations and understandings that American volunteers give to their actions with regard to Ukraine.

[98] Jane Ritchie et al., eds., *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, 2. ed (Los Angeles, Calif.: Sage, 2014).

[99] Della Porta, *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research*, 231.

Participant Recruitment and Sampling

It is not feasible to interview all 3000+ surviving Ukraine RPCVs, so sampling was done with an intention toward representational generalization. Ritchie and Lewis advise that generalization in qualitative research does not entail statistically reflecting the population, but rather includes "the range of views, experiences, outcomes, or other phenomena under study, and the factors and circumstances that shape and influence them."[100] Factors and circumstances accounted for in sampling include when and where RPCVs served, the nature of their work, prior knowledge about and interest in Ukraine, and demographic traits like age, gender, and ethnicity. Furthermore, Lewis and Nicholls suggest including a comparison group "to better understand the population that is the main focus of the research."[101] This study therefore includes some Americans with no sojourn background who got involved after the invasion. The goal is not to measure intergroup differences, but rather to understand dimensions of difference. With this in mind, semi-structured interviews were conducted with people from three categories:

- Americans with no pre-2022 sojourn history in Ukraine who have devoted at least some time and/or money to Ukrainian causes since 2022
- Ukraine RPCVs currently based in the US who have devoted at least some time and/or money to Ukrainian causes since 2022
- Ukraine RPCVs who have moved back to Ukraine since the invasion

To differentiate sojourning from other transnational experiences, like diaspora, sampling targeted interviewees who do not identify as Ukrainian[102] and who have not married Ukrainian nationals.

[100] Ritchie and Lewis, "Generalising from Qualitative Research," 269.
[101] Ritchie et al., *Qualitative Research Practice*, 65.
[102] One participant noted having a great-grandparent from Ukraine during the interview, but also traced heritage to other countries in eastern Europe.

A mix of snowball and convenience sampling was used to recruit interviewees with no pre-2022 sojourn history. Purposive sampling informed by the concept of representational generalization was used to recruit RPCV interviewees according to the criteria below:

- **Breadth in timing of sojourn** to capture experiences during different periods of modern Ukrainian history from the 1990s to 2020.
- **Diversity in location of sojourn** to gather perspectives from multiple regions, given linguistic and political differences across Ukraine and varying impacts from the war.
- **Inclusion of different Peace Corps Ukraine project sector**s to account for variations in work settings and social networks.
- **Different levels of prior interest in Ukraine** to include people who chose Ukraine and those who did not, and capture different levels of pre-service knowledge about Ukraine.

A list of potential interviewees for whom the researcher could obtain contact information was used to send initial invitations via email or messaging applications. RPCV invitations were first sent individually and then posted in a Ukraine RPCV social media group. Non-RPCV invitations were sent by referrals or through sister city and advocacy organizations. As noted in the Position Statement, most invitees were familiar with the researcher through her previous role in a Ukraine RPCV organization, so efforts were made to minimize social pressure they might feel to participate. Initial invitation messages indicated that no response was required; people who were not interested could disregard the invitation. A non-response was interpreted as declining, and resulted in no further contact. Invitation messages had a link to an online pre-interview questionnaire invitees could fill out to indicate their interest in participating (Appendix B). The questionnaire included informed consent provisions and a final question by which

invitees could decline or agree to interview. The fact that one invitee used the question to decline indicates this was an effective additional measure to ensure invitees had chances to opt out.

Interviewees were selected from among those who affirmed their interest via the questionnaire, with attention to representation across time, sector, and region of service. If multiple invitees had similar profiles, US state of residence was used as a criterion to build in US geographic representation. After the first round of interviews, additional targeted outreach through social media and snowball sampling filled gaps noticed in location and project sector.

The same online questionnaire was distributed to recruit non-RPCV participants, albeit through snowball and convenience sampling. Overall, invitations were sent directly to approximately thirty people and distributed through two sister city organizations and the Ukraine RPCV social media group. A total of thirty-four people filled in the pre-interview questionnaire, with thirty-three agreeing to interview. Of them, twenty-one were selected according to the criteria above. Three of the selected people did not schedule interview appointments, resulting in a total of eighteen interviewees.

Description of Sample

The recruitment process described above yielded participants from all three categories. As intended for the primary research focus on people with a history of sojourn in Ukraine, the majority are Ukraine RPCVs. Table 1 shows the number of interviewees from each category.

Table 1: Interviewees by Category

Category	Number of Interviewees
RPCV in Ukraine	4
RPCV in USA	11
Non-RPCV American Volunteer in USA	3
Grand Total	**18**

Non-RPCV interviewees:

All non-RPCV interviewees were men aged 60+ in California, although with different personal backgrounds and levels of involvement with Ukraine-related causes. Two are retired while one is employed. Efforts were made to find people of different genders and age groups, but reliance on snowball sampling resulted in interviewees being clustered in the same state and sharing some characteristics. Table 2 summarizes information about non-RPCV interviewees.

Table 2: Non-RPCV Interviewee Characteristics

ID	State	Gender	Racial or Ethnic Self-Identification	Age	Been to Ukraine?
USA-N-1	CA	M	Asian	76	Yes, in 2022 or later
USA-N-2	CA	M	Caucasian/White	65	Yes, in 2022 or later
USA-N-3	CA	M	Caucasian/White	60	Never

RPCV Interviewees

Purposive sampling yielded a Ukraine RPCV interviewee pool diverse in service location, time, project sector, and prior level of interest in Ukraine. The 15 RPCVs interviewed served in urban and rural communities spanning 11 *oblasts* across western, central, eastern, and southern Ukraine.[103] Interviewees' communities are variously impacted by the Russo-Ukrainian war, including places under Russian occupation or contested control, places near the front lines, and quieter places under Ukrainian control. All three main Peace Corps Ukraine project sectors are included. Some interviewees served in multiple capacities by pursuing Peace Corps Response placements after their initial two-year service, or joining the Virtual Service Pilot Project after returning to the US. Years of service span from 1999 to the end of in-person programs in 2020,

[103] One interviewee had back-to-back placements in two different oblasts, both of which are counted. However, the oblasts where some volunteers either lived or engaged in online service after in-person service are not counted.

and include key events like the 2003-2004 Orange Revolution and the 2013-2014 Revolution of Dignity of. Changes to Peace Corps application procedures over time mean some interviewees could indicate a preference of region or country, while others could not. Among interviewees who had the option, some expressed a preference for Eastern Europe or Ukraine, some expressed no location preference, and others preferred different regions or were selected to serve in other countries and then redirected to Ukraine. This diversity in prior interest mitigates the potential impact of self-selection bias when analyzing attachment to Ukraine following service.

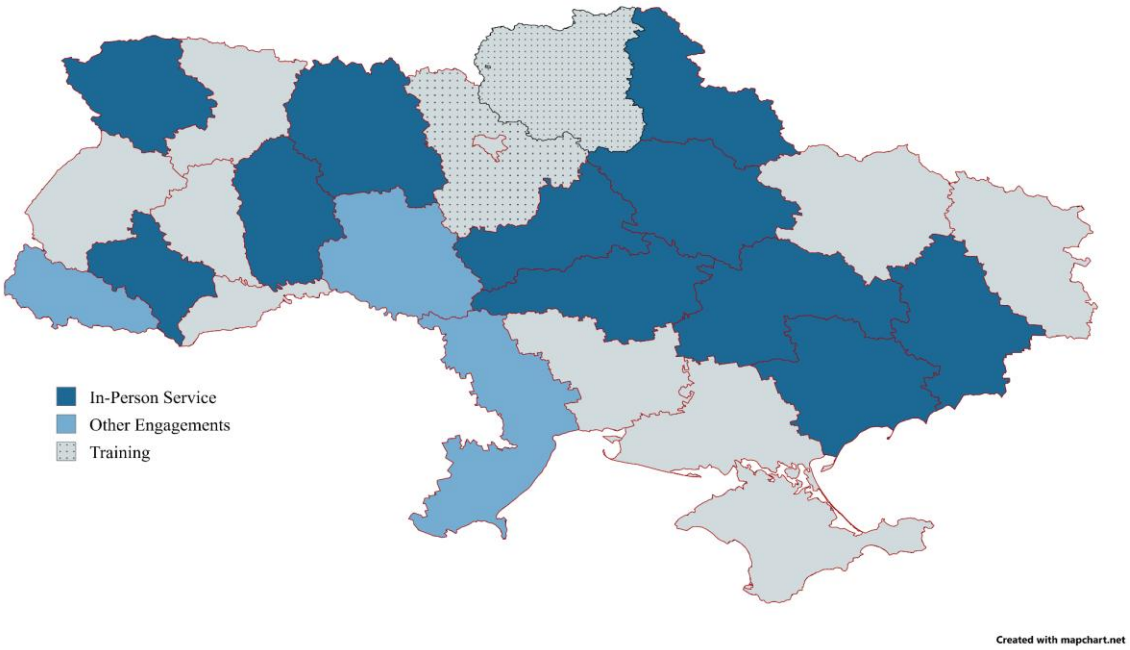
US-based RPCVs are geographically diverse in current location, with residences spanning the mountain west, southwest, south, and east coast. Conversely, Ukraine-based RPCVs all reside in central Ukraine.[104] The tables below give an overview of RPCVs interviewed for this research. Information is presented in separate tables to preserve confidentiality.

Table 3: RPCV Interviewees by Peace Corps Service Region

Service Location in Ukraine	Number of Interviewees
Central	4
East	2
North-Central	2
South	2
West	5
Grand Total	**15**

[104] One participant was interviewed just a few days before relocating to Ukraine from the US. Although the interview was conducted while this participant was still in the US, this interviewee is counted as a Ukraine-based RPCV.

Figure 1: Map of Oblasts of Service, Training, and Other Engagements



Oblasts shaded dark blue in Figure 1 indicate where RPCVs in this study lived and worked for their in-person assignments. Oblasts where interviewees stayed during pre-service training but that were not interviewees' service sites are marked with dots. Oblasts shaded light blue indicate other engagements after service, including working in person in Ukraine in other capacities, and engaging with communities online through the Virtual Service Pilot Project.

Table 4: Interviewees by Two-Year Project Sector

Sector	Number of Interviewees
Community Development	5
Education	8
Youth Development	2
Grand Total	**15**

Most RPCVs interviewed for this study either completed the standard two-year service period or came close to it (some were evacuated), while several extended their service or applied for Peace Corps Response to stay in Ukraine longer. Service years covered by interviewees span from 1999 to 2020. Table 5 below groups interviewees in relation to three key time periods:

- Prior to the Orange Revolution that took place from late 2004 into early 2005. [105]
- Between the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity in winter of 2013-2014.
- From the relaunch of Peace Corps operations in 2015 to the pandemic evacuation in 2020. There were no volunteers in Crimea, Luhansk, or Donetsk oblasts during this time.

Table 5: Interviewees by Time of Service in Ukraine

Time Period of Service	Number of Interviewees
2004 or earlier	2
2005-2014	5
2013-2016	1
2015-2020	7
Grand Total	**15**

Conducting and Analyzing Interviews

This study used a semi-structured, responsive interview approach. Questions loosely followed an interview guide (Appendix C) to elicit relevant information while staying open to emergent themes and adapting to interviewee communication styles. Question wording was adapted to match interviewees' word usage or refer to things they mentioned, and follow-up prompts were used to elicit further responses. The interview guide put key concepts in

[105] One interviewee technically served 2003-2005, but finished service in the beginning of 2005. Since the Revolution did not start until the end of 2004 into the beginning of 2005, this volunteer is counted as serving pre-Orange Revolution. Another interviewee who began service prior to the Revolution of Dignity was evacuated for an extended period and then returned after programming resumed, which is reflected as a 2013-2016 period of service.

chronological order: interviewees' relational setting and emotional experiences during and after service (for RPCVs) or when they first got involved with Ukraine (for non-RPCVs); recollections of the start of the full-scale invasion; and reflections on what is at stake for Ukraine and the US in the war. The interview guide was piloted with a US-based RPCV, then further refined and adapted into versions for non-RPCVs and Ukraine-based RPCVs. Interviews were conducted in English by the researcher over a one-month time period. Three people were interviewed in person in Ukraine, and all others were interviewed via video call. Except for one joint interview with a couple, participants were interviewed individually.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed digitally, then manually corrected by listening to the recordings and loaded into MAXQDA to code for basic content analysis. Initial coding based on the theoretical framework and interview guide identified passages most relevant to the research questions and informed subsequent iterative rounds of coding for common themes.

Ethical Considerations

The primary ethical consideration in this research pertains to the privacy of interviewees and people mentioned by interviewees whose security or livelihood may be endangered by information shared in interviews. Ukrainians, particularly those near the front lines or in Russian-occupied territories, may be targeted for their work, views, or evidence of collaboration with Americans. There are also increasing risks to American interviewees in the 2025 US environment of widespread layoffs and alleged loyalty screenings of people employed in federal government agencies, particularly regarding matters of foreign policy. Therefore, the pre-interview questionnaire included an open-ended question for respondents to note security concerns and preferences. All persons referred to in this paper, whether interviewees or mentioned by interviewees, have been assigned pseudonyms. With only a few exceptions,

mentions of city or town names have been redacted and replaced by bracketed general phrases such as [the city]. Interviewees were briefed on these precautions.

An additional ethical consideration relates to discussing traumatic events. Interviewees were informed of general interview topics ahead of time, including discussion of the war, through the combined pre-interview questionnaire/informed consent form and an oral briefing at the start of the interview. Interviewees were encouraged to factor in transition time between ending their interview and handling any other commitments, to allow for processing emotions that come up during the conversation. The interview guide was structured to begin with general, interviewee-centered questions to build rapport before turning to questions about the war, and ended with questions that allowed for expressing hopes and reflections.

The pre-interview questionnaire and informed consent form provided information and requested consent for all provisions of conducting and using the interview, including:

- Privacy preferences, including sensitive, safety-related needs for confidentiality.
- Permission to record interviews for transcription/analysis by the researcher.
- Permission to use anonymized direct quotes and/or summarized content from interviews.
- Information about when and where the final paper will be made accessible.
- Time limit of when interviewees can withdraw their participation.
- Acknowledgement that some portions of the interview may be emotional or stressful.

Analysis

This study takes on a relatively simple question: Why are Americans who sojourned as volunteers in Ukraine in the past so consistently donating, volunteering, advocating, etc. in the present as Ukraine resists invasion by Russia? What motivates their solidarity? This observed solidarity counters prior findings that international development volunteers' identification with the country of service weakens after leaving.[106,107] However, those studies did little to account for variations in relational settings, and did not account for instances of crisis.

This analysis covers the two lines of inquiry introduced in the Theoretical Framework. After providing additional background about the interviewees, the first section of this analysis employs a relational-processual approach to explore the social and emotional impacts of social immersion in a relational setting of active nation-building in a newly independent country. The next section examines the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a traumatizing experience that drives people to seek the company of understanding others and take action.

Interviews revealed information useful for establishing representational generalization beyond the criteria and demographics discussed in the Methodology chapter. RPCVs had differing levels of knowledge about and interest in Ukraine before starting their Peace Corps service, ranging from having been to Ukraine or getting relevant historical education and language training, to admittedly knowing almost nothing. Volunteers had diverse experiences in Ukraine, with some so comfortable that they extended their service, and others relieved to finish

[106] Meghan Elizabeth Kallman, "Dimensions of Cosmopolitanism: Patriotism and Disaffection Among U.S. Peace Corps Volunteers," *International Journal of Sociology* 48, no. 3 (2018): 189–215.
[107] Lesley Watson, "Three Bases of Identity in Global Context: Transnationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and National Identity among International Sojourners" (Ph.D., United States -- Georgia, Emory University, 2014), https://www.proquest.com/docview/1559962128/abstract/4984A1F9980B4A4BPQ/1.

their two years and move on. Several RPCVs encountered Soviet nostalgia and positive attitudes toward Russia (prior to 2014), while others served in communities they felt to be long-standing bastions of Ukrainian nationalism. Since 2022, some have witnessed the dissonance of friends adjusting to life under Russian occupation or been forced to restrict contact due to surveillance, while others can freely communicate and make return visits. RPCVs vary in age, income, family structure, and work commitments. Having established background diversity, the analysis below focuses mostly on what is consistent across RPCVs' experiences and motivations. In contrast to the diverse RPCVs interviewed, non-RPCVs had rather similar profiles, all being men either recently retired or approaching retirement and looking to fill free time with meaningful activities.

"I love Ukraine" - Affective Experiences of Belonging and Shared Endeavor

The first line of inquiry explores how the relational setting and emotional experiences of volunteering in Ukraine impact RPCVs' feelings of connection and solidarity. A recurrent theme across interviews is love, which has long been acknowledged by scholars of nationalism as a powerful motivator. Gellner states in his seminal work on nationalism that people, "*love* their country, their people, their culture. Their love is sincere, deep and disinterested. Indisputably, it may on occasion help them and their fellows to rise to levels of altruism and self-sacrifice of which they would not otherwise be capable."[108] However, Gellner limited this idea of love to one's own country. The present analysis examines how love for a nation other than one's own emerges during sojourn and persists in a transnational web of connectedness. Love is a particularly salient theme among RPCVs, who spent several years in Ukraine, compared to people who had never been to Ukraine prior to Russia's 2022 invasion. Many RPCV interviewees made statements about loving Ukraine, loving their community in Ukraine, and/or

[108] Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (London: Phoenix, 1998), 11.

loving their work in Ukraine. In contrast, non-RPCVs never specifically brought up loving Ukraine, although some mentioned love when discussing local affiliations in the US or perceptions of Ukrainians' love for the USA.

The prevalence of love for Ukraine as a theme among Ukraine RPCVs indicates that sojourning can yield strong and lasting attachments to a country. For many people interviewed, this love emerged and continues to manifest through a sense of belonging: firstly, through relational ties as "part of the family" and "part of the community" that flow into relational ties with Ukraine itself; and secondly, through involvement in Ukraine's post-independence national transformation as "part of the change." While some RPCVs experienced only one or the other kind of belonging, for many they are intertwined. Even the handful who do not describe a sense of belonging in Ukraine nevertheless describe connectedness through their social ties and participation in change efforts. In all cases, this belonging or connectedness not only inspires an active response to crisis, but makes it seem unquestionable. The sense that supporting Ukraine is an obvious outgrowth of their connections differentiates RPCVs from non-RPCVs.

Part of the Family, Part of the Community: Love of Nation Through Relational Ties

> *"I love Ukraine. I love my host family. I love the community."* ~ Allison, RPCV

> *"I felt that people were starting to see me as an intrinsic part of their community, and that was something that I wanted to stay a part of [...] I really started to identify very strongly with Ukraine."* ~ Jordan, RPCV

For many RPCVs, love for Ukraine developed through self-understandings and social connections that made them feel like they belonged there. This belonging emerged through relationships with host families and friends, as well as routine interactions and community-focused work. Allison, who extended her service to nearly four years, shared how she and her host family, "made *paska* every Easter, and all the different salads, and I would attend all their

family events. And I felt so welcomed. I felt so a part of their family. They called me their second daughter."[109] While Allison served in her early twenties, becoming part of the family was not limited to young volunteers. Melanie, who served in her late sixties, had a similar experience: "All I can say is that these folks treated me to the core like an honored member of the family - and I was honored." Like Allison, Melanie joined ritual events with her host family, like preparing food for multi-day wedding celebrations. Both examples contain elements of what Heaney says builds a "national habitus" - emotionally impactful time doing things with others while consuming national symbols and stories. Although Easter and weddings are not overtly national events the way state holidays are, Allison's reference to *paska* and Melanie's descriptions of weddings rich with traditional Hutsul[110] food and clothing mark symbolic elements experienced as being Ukrainian. Events like weddings furthermore bridge family and community (especially when the whole village shows up). Many RPCVs describe community-level belonging that manifests in a care ethic and familiarity they consider unique to Ukraine. Brendan felt this belonging in routine interactions like shopping: "Either I'd see someone I know or I'd see people I knew by face, which was very gratifying. I've never had that in my life before. Like, I would know everyone at the bazaar who I shop with." Such experiences of belonging entail not only knowing others, but also feeling known by them. For Allison, this manifested in simple interactions like neighbors shouting from their windows to remind her to put on a scarf in cold weather. Such moments showed that, "people in a small town - people take care of each other. They notice each other." Brendan and Liz both note how working as educators creates quasi-familial care ties. Brendan describes students as having been under his care, and Liz

[109] Paska is a special Easter bread traditionally baked in several eastern European countries, including Ukraine.
[110] Hutsuls are a pastoral highlander people living in the Carpathian Mountains of Ukraine. Many aspects of Hutsul history and and culture have come to be seen as core parts of Ukrainian history and culture.

asserts, “I care deeply about my students, no matter how long ago they were my students. They're still my babies.” Jason frames mutual care as characteristic of Ukrainian society, stating that although Ukrainians might not express the same generalized politeness toward strangers that Americans do, they, “care for each other here [...] deep down they care. And so I know I could go literally to any apartment, any house and say, ‘Hey, I need to sleep on your couch.” [...] Everyone's willing to help.” He contrasts this belonging against its perceived lack in the US, as does Jordan: “I've grown up my entire life in the US. That's something that I have never felt [...] I never have felt as embraced by people as I have in Ukraine.”

For volunteers in Ukraine, belonging incorporated rather than eliminated the fact of being a foreigner. Before sharing her scarf story, Allison mentioned how people around town recognized her as the local *amerikanka* (American girl/woman) - a foreigner known in the community and treated as one of its members. Melanie similarly describes being recognized as “the American” in her village, where she developed a reputation for cleaning up roadside litter while on errands. For some volunteers, Ukrainian friends actively asserted this belonging over others’ misgivings or prejudices. Megan served in a place where Soviet nostalgia and skepticism of Americans ran deep, but her friend introduced her to others by saying, “she's an American, but she's okay. She's one of us [...] she's our American. *Nasha Amerikanka*.”[111] Jordan felt like an outsider upon arriving in Ukraine, particularly as a person of color, but like Megan he had people he describes as allies and ambassadors: “Once people accepted me and took me in, we were locked in completely, and so it was very, very easy after that initial push to then get people to trust me and hang out with me and defend me.” Several RPCVs overcame suspicions rooted in patterns of sex tourism and “wife-shopping” by foreigners in Ukraine, or fears about spying.

[111] *Nasha* translates to “our” or “ours.”

They felt their efforts to learn about and understand Ukraine were eventually reciprocated with lasting trust and friendship. Although no interview questions used the word "belonging," Melanie describes her experience with such an assertion: "Well, it's absolutely a sense of belonging." It is perhaps precisely the processual nature of belonging-as-foreigner that made volunteers in Ukraine so keenly appreciate it. Whether belonging was offered readily through immediate welcome and inclusion, or built over time with support from allies and cultural mediators, volunteers noticed acts of acceptance. Even those who did not fully experience belonging express lasting connections to the people who actively accepted and assisted them. Raquel rarely felt comfortable in Ukraine due to racial discrimination, yet she emphasizes that her friendships, "mean a lot to me, especially those people who took me in not knowing who I was, complete stranger, from a different culture, and taught me how to survive over there." Dev cites similar appreciation for Ukrainians whose help navigating the culture as a person of a different ethnicity made him feel safer and work more effectively.

RPCVs' descriptions of connectedness often flow seamlessly between host family, community, and nation. For Jordan, "People were really starting to treat me like family, and I felt that people were starting to see me as an intrinsic part of their community, and that was something that I wanted to stay a part of [...] I really started to identify very strongly with Ukraine." Allison extended her service because, "I love Ukraine. I love my host family. I love the community." Seeing youth from her school start joining her projects at an orphanage contributed to a sense that she was part of a communal effort to weave the town's social fabric even tighter. She has not experienced similar fulfillment since, and years after evacuation forced an early return to the US, "Ukraine [...] still feels like home." RPCVs not only felt connections with people around them, but developed self-understandings that incorporated those connections

- the second daughter, the honored family member, the intrinsic part of the community. The community belonging that Allison and Jordan describe is something what Dev was missing before he joined the Peace Corps: “I felt so disconnected from the community at large where I was living [...] and so doing this kind of work, I felt like it brought me more closer to a community, and it gave me a wonderful community, too.” Dev traces a thread from his host family and work to his motivation to support Ukraine, saying he felt compelled to return during the invasion because people in Ukraine had helped him:

> *It was incredibly important to me because of the impact Ukraine had in my life [...] I think you can never really pay anybody back, because that moment in time when you're given a resource or you're given something is a moment in time that never comes back, but you can pay it forward. And I felt that this was my way of paying it forward-back, sort of, back to Ukraine.*

Although Dev earlier listed individuals (host family, Peace Corps staff, colleagues), in the quoted statement he portrays them as part of Ukraine, presenting Ukraine as a bounded entity that can receive his debt of gratitude toward Ukrainians. His acknowledgement of “impact” is akin to Ahmed’s term, “impression,” for denoting the perception of one body being impacted, or impressed upon, by another. As discussed in the Theoretical Framework, such impact delineates both boundaries and points of attachment. For Dev, this impact formed a lasting connection.

The social and emotional connections RPCVs develop during sojourn constitute transnational social fields in which witnessing the war is characterized by simultaneity and persisting duties of care. These duties extend not only to particular people, but to the Ukrainian nation as something important to those people. Since 2022, Allison has helped her host family (whom she also calls “chosen family”) meet basic needs, and gotten grant funding for the town orphanage. She frames these actions as neighborly responsibility: “When your friends are struggling, and when life is super unstable, you help them [...] It didn't make a big difference

whether they were here in the States, my neighbors here, or my neighbors abroad in Ukraine, which was home." Her response indicates the simultaneity of being both "here" and "there."[112] Having become part of her community as a local foreigner, she now has "neighbors abroad," and distance does not lessen her inclination to support them in hard times. Melanie describes a similar simultaneity with her community and with Ukraine overall:

> *I still have an alarm that Lydia put on my phone for when they have air raids [...] It's absolutely the all-day awareness. And [...] not just the war, but Ukraine. And it does impact my activities in a lot of ways with the group that I'm involved with, and the conversations I have with people when I'm out and about [...] it's just part of everyday, you know. Thinking about going and picking up the mail. Yeah, the war. And I need to go grocery shopping and yes, I see the news that another man [from my village] has died [...] It's just part of life. Ukraine and the war are just part of my life right now.*

Despite being thousands of miles away, Melanie can count how many soldiers from her region are currently deployed, and how many have died. Although she has helped some Ukrainians find refuge in the US, she prefers projects that support Ukraine's sovereignty. She donated money to a group weaving camouflage nets for the defense forces during a post-2022 visit, and at the time of interviewing was preparing a fundraiser for military families. She describes wanting to support people who are, "staying in Ukraine. These are people who know this is where they belong." She is invested in Ukraine's sovereignty because her friends and neighbors, "don't want to be part of Russia." Nadia likewise notes the importance of Ukrainian nationhood to her friends as a motivator for action: "The invasion to me was so black and white, and the sincerity of the activists and people I know to view themselves as Ukrainian and want to be in Ukraine, and I - I was going to say want peace - want *victory* and

[112] Steven Vertovec, "Transnationalism and Identity," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27, no. 4 (October 2001): 573–82, https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830120090386.

then peace [...] Watching their struggle and their conviction makes me not want it to be ignored." Notably, Melanie and Nadia served on opposite sides of Ukraine, but express similar attitudes about Ukrainian nationhood.

RPCVs frame supporting Ukraine as a personal duty that is not only obvious, but perhaps even "biased" or "selfish" because it is within their own social field. This contrasts with other Americans, who frame their actions to support Ukraine as ones that help others. Liz did a conference presentation about Ukraine because, "things in this region are impacting people I'm friends with, or that I care about" and she felt a duty to provide informed responses to questions about Ukraine from Americans. For Nadia, her connections to Ukraine differentiate how she relates to it, and make helping in a time of need such a basic assumption that she is uncomfortable with being thanked for her extensive volunteer work:

> *I'm following what's happening in Georgia, for example, or other places. And I've been there, but I don't relate to it in the same way [...] I can't personalize it for people in any way. And I think for RPCVs - you know, Ukrainian Americans and diaspora will thank me, and I am always uncomfortable with the thanking, because I'll say, it's like a second home for us. I mean, I lived there for two years, and people welcomed me. Of course I'm going to do what I can if there's an opening. Whereas other places in terrible situations, I can donate, but I can't speak with any sense of understanding or personal experience.*

For Nadia, it is an obvious expectation to help people who welcomed her to a second home. Mark describes himself and his wife Danielle feeling, "a little biased because we lived there, and we served there, and it changed our lives." Despite feeling morally obliged to care about struggles all over the world, he acknowledges being compelled by his friendships in Ukraine: "I sat on the floor of these people's homes during the holidays and played with their kids [...] so when this conflict reignited in 2022, yeah, it hit us very hard. It was very personal." Melissa, whose community of service is under Russian occupation, says, "I have a very selfish

focus, which is that I want Russia out of [the city], and I know that that is just my own friends and my own needs. But that's what I want the most." Jordan describes feeling, "a little bit guilty about trying to center Ukraine [...] but at the end of the day, I have to just persist and do it." During service, RPCVs developed connections and self-understandings as friends, family members, and neighbors that persist in a transnational social sphere. Furthermore, their descriptions of connectedness match what Uehling found in pre-2022 conflict zones in eastern Ukraine: "attachments to family and nation were thoroughly entangled," and loyalty to a friend or family member could be "mapped seamlessly onto loyalty to nation."[113] For RPCVs, supporting Ukraine is not so much supporting others as supporting one's own. Their feeling of "bias" is not unlike what Brubaker calls "homeland orientation," although it is an orientation toward a second home rather than a homeland.

For Melissa, supporting one's own was so basic that she set a personal policy of unceremoniously wiring a fixed sum of money to any Ukrainian acquaintance who asked: "I don't need to know why, and I'll just do it." In contrast to RPCVs' perception that they are acting on obligations or even self-interest, and the discomfort some feel about being thanked, non-RPCVs in this study describe being thanked as rewarding and motivating. Dylan, who began running aid missions to Ukraine in 2023 after having never been there, decided to keep doing so because, "They're just so grateful and so - thank you. They can't thank you enough." Roger links his most vivid memories of visiting Ukraine to gratitude: "They of course were very grateful that I did what I did. They were very moved that someone would raise all this money, go to Ukraine and help their countrymen and countrywomen." Lonny, who has organized fundraisers for projects in Ukraine and to assist Ukrainians in the US, describes

[113] Uehling, *Everyday War*, 97.

handing checks to refugees in his city as more "effective and rewarding" than sending money abroad. Without the connectedness of having "neighbors abroad," money sent to Ukraine is less emotionally impactful than money given to new Ukrainian neighbors in the US. Without the simultaneity that makes ridding a faraway city of Russian troops into one's "own needs," aiding Ukraine is an act of helping others. Such acts of helping others perhaps require more affirmation that one is doing the right thing. Compared to RPCVs doing what seems obvious, some non-RPCVs describe being unsure how to respond to the invasion at first. The gratitude of others provides informative guiding cues for people aware they are outsiders.

The difference between RPCVs and non-RPCVs reflects the difference between what Brubaker labels "commonality" and "connectedness" as building blocks of belonging. Recall that "connectedness" is "relational ties that link people." RPCVs overwhelmingly describe being motivated by a belonging built on connectedness that developed in Ukraine. Non-RPCVs lack comparable stories of belonging, but instead describe commonality - "the sharing of some common attribute."[114] Dylan feels commonality as a military veteran, Roger as a child of refugees, and Lonny as a "member of the proletariat" opposed to authoritarian rule. These commonalities are not specific to Ukraine, but motivate solidarity. Hence, while RPCVs and non-RPCVs take similar actions - fundraising, aid deliveries, etc. - the difference between connectedness and commonality as motivators articulates what is emotionally distinct for RPCVs. These emotional drivers are discussed further under Line of Inquiry 2.

Part of the Change: Love of Nation Through Shared Endeavor

> *"At that moment, that's when I decided. I said, 'I cannot miss what's going to happen in the next few years in Ukraine.'"* ~Evan, RPCV

[114] Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" 20.

"Not only do I have hope for what Ukraine will look like after the war, but I have hope for the part that I will play in that by just being there and being a part of the people."
~Jordan, RPCV

Being "part of the family" and "part of the community" reflect the relational component of what Heaney calls a "relational and historical matrix."[115] Being "part of the change" is tied to the historical component. The relational and historical matrix shapes processes in which individuals develop a connection with a nation. Heaney calls the process and its results "national habitus" (an alternative to "identity"), and illustrates it using 20th-century Ireland - like Ukraine, a nation newly independent from colonial rule by a nearby country. For Ukraine RPCVs, post-independence nation building was a key feature of their sojourn. Being "part of the change" during an important part of history created emotional investedness in Ukraine's nationhood - a possibility noted in Levitt and Glick Schiller's observation that people enact transnational belonging in response to opportunity, not just crisis.[116]

The RPCVs interviewed almost universally describe Ukraine in terms of nation-building and transformation. Some already had this idea before going, like Brendan who chose Ukraine because, "My Senator talked about Ukraine a lot. It seems like a country that's undergoing a lot of change. So, I would love to kind of get in on that, to be part of that [...] I'd love to be part of the change that's happening right now." Others, like Evan, experienced transformation while there in person. After witnessing the Orange Revolution, he decided, "I cannot miss what's going to happen in the next few years in Ukraine," and stayed to launch a business. Most RPCVs trace this sense of change to Ukraine being a young nation shedding a colonial and communist past.

[115] Jonathan Heaney, "Emotions and Nationalism: A Reappraisal," in *Emotions in Politics*, ed. Nicolas Demertzis (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), 9, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137025661_13.
[116] Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society," *The International Migration Review* 38, no. 3 (2004): 1002–39.

Raquel describes how Ukrainians, “for hundreds of years have acted like their own people, but they never had their own place. And so, they finally had a country of their own, and it was only like 16 years old when I got there. So, we were like, ‘Ukraine is a teenager.’ They're still trying to figure out themselves.” Like Raquel, Melanie refers to Ukraine as a “baby nation” with a firm sense of nationhood but only recent sovereignty. Mark, who served after the Revolution of Dignity, refers to Ukraine being in an especially profound time. “I think it's one of the most incredible time periods for a country, as far as historically, to participate in that, and to see this young sovereign nation trying to break away from the Soviet era [...] right now, we're in Ukraine's history [...] we saw a country transforming, or trying to transform.” Raquel, who served shortly after the Orange Revolution, says, “it was awesome to be in that spot at the time.” This excitement at witnessing and contributing to Ukraine’s national development - to being in its history - point to Brubaker’s elaboration of Anderson’s idea of “joinability.”[117] The active reimagining of independent Ukraine makes for an open and exciting national cause to join.

This sense of joinability manifests in the perceived openness of Ukrainians to change, which facilitates interactions that cultivate solidarity. Liz recalls being surprised by Ukrainians’ willingness to learn negative things about historic national heroes when she taught about anti-Jewish violence at a diversity-focused youth camp, Camp Unity. She felt they were more open than Americans to criticisms of their country’s “founding fathers.” Jordan was similarly surprised by receptiveness to diversity work, citing it as a source of hope: “There's a lot of work to be done, especially when it comes to LGBT rights [...] some racial things as well [...] but I do think it's a lot further along [...] What especially marks Ukraine as being different [...] is a willingness among the people in the institutions to actually learn and take action.” Jason notes

[117] Brubaker, “In the Name of the Nation.”

that, “Ukraine is very open to new ideas” and looks forward to continuing change ahead of EU accession. Such conversations about what Ukraine is like and what it might become constitute what Collins calls “interaction rituals” characterized by physical proximity, mutual focus, and shared mood.[118] Whether leading events like Camp Unity or Model UN, or tackling regional development plans, RPCVs spent time with others while keeping a mutual focus on topics like Ukraine’s current issues and future opportunities, and feeling moods of hope and excitement.[119] Jordan recalls that, “people were very, very hopeful about the future [...] very excited to talk to me about the future, and to talk to me about aspirations that they had.” Interaction rituals, including simple conversations, create feelings of solidarity,[120] which are amplified when people witness collective impact. Dev describes feeling motivated by how decentralization reforms impacted community responses to the invasion. Raquel is interested in visiting Ukraine again after avoiding it for years because, “my friend Inna, she's like ‘Raquel, you wouldn't recognize Ukraine today’ and I was just like, ‘Well, then, I have to go see what we did. I have to go see the contribution that we made.’” Hers and Dev’s experiences exemplify Heaney’s assertion that, “positive and negative emotions are implicated in the activities of social movements and, by extension, to the changes that such movements bring about.”[121] Feelings of shared effort and accomplishment that emerge during interaction rituals with host families, friends, students, and colleagues cultivate micro-solidarity networks - a basis for national solidarity.

[118] Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, Princeton Studies in Cultural Sociology (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 48.
[119] While Collins describes there being a shared mood, Ahmed asserts that moods and emotions themselves are not shared, rather suggesting that objects of emotion are shared - so, in this case, Ukraine would be a shared object of emotion toward which people are experiencing feelings together, and even if they do not literally share feelings between one another, their experience of others’ emotions can guide and amplify their own emotions.
[120] Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, 49.
[121] Heaney, “Emotions and Nationalism,” 245.

According to Malešević, high-contact, face-to-face micro-solidarity networks like families and community organizations are the building blocks for macro-cohesion at the more abstract level of nation.[122] RPCVs were embedded in such networks as they worked on activities that Berezin considers core to nation building projects, namely, "ongoing actions where collective actors institutionalize new norms, values, and procedures."[123] Nearly every RPCV interviewed spoke about activities devoted to education, civic engagement, diversity and inclusion, democratic self-governance, anti-corruption practices, and regional or national pride. To use Heaney's words, their activities were all imbued with a "notion of nation" - namely, that of a transforming, democratic Ukraine. Nadia's service connected her to community activists who led marches through town and organized a tour of their region to both cultivate regional pride and call for action on environmental issues. These activists later took part in pro-Ukrainian resistance during occupation in 2014, and since 2022 continue their activism despite being displaced. Nadia, "loved their activism" when she met them years ago, and it continues today: "They're all staying [in Ukraine] and volunteering and doing what they consider their part. And they find a mission in that, and so they're easy to want to support once you understand. That's part of why I think I keep pushing, too, because they're so inspiring, and I feel like, if I can adequately communicate that to others, then people will want to be involved." For Nadia, the micro-solidarity network of activist friends connects her to Ukraine's nationhood, and encourages further bridging of such networks to support her friends and their cause.

[122] Siniša Malešević, "Nationalism, War and Social Cohesion," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 2011): 149, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2010.489647.

[123] Mabel Berezin, "Secure States: Towards a Political Sociology of Emotion," *The Sociological Review* 50, no. 2_suppl (October 1, 2002): 41, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2002.tb03590.x.

The experience of being together with a shared focus and circulating emotions also makes mass demonstrations especially compelling. This effect is dramatic for volunteers who witnessed Ukraine's popular revolutions. According to Berezin, "communities of feeling" that gather people in public spaces to express emotional energy, "whether staged or spontaneous, serve to intensify emotional identification with the polity and derive emotional power from their transience."[124] As mentioned above, Evan decided to stay in Ukraine after witnessing the Orange Revolution. Years later he still vividly describes people marching with flags outside his classroom while he was teaching. He felt that "the Orange Revolution was almost like a democracy in action. I was watching it for the first time in my life - to see the people's voice being heard." Later, he was settled in Ukraine when the Revolution of Dignity[125] brought thousands of people to Kyiv's *Maidan Nezalezhnosti*: "My employees went out there. My lawyers went out there. Most of my friends went out there. I was out there." His experience exemplifies how Berezin describes mass events generating lasting solidarity: first the immediate sense of, "we are all here together, we must share something" and then the collective memory of, "We were all there together."[126] Jason similarly recalls, "I was here during *Maidan*. I was here to see what it really is like, to see the potential in the country and the people here." Witnessing *Maidan* helped him "fall in love with the country even more" because "it was very inspiring to see people fighting for what they want, fighting for freedom, fighting to become their own country." This sense that Ukrainians are highly motivated and fighting for their nation's future is seemingly contagious, with Ukraine becoming a collectively circulating object of elevated

[124] Berezin, 39.
[125] The Revolution of Dignity is also sometimes referred to as the *Maidan* or *Euromaidan*.
[126] Berezin, 45.

emotions in a highly energized, collective setting. The solidarity formed in these settings encourages continued support for Ukraine now in the current time of war.

RPCV stories trace a throughline from host family belonging and community care they experienced as volunteers, through solidarity during events like *Maidan,* up to community care and national cohesion in wartime. All these experiences imbued with a sense of Ukrainian nationhood feed into hope for Ukraine's future and motivate resistance against Russia. Kelly ties numerous "little things" together to explain her love for and motivation to stay in Ukraine:

> *Ukraine just has something that I haven't felt somewhere else [...] Whatever this something that I can't identify is, is why I fell in love with it, why I wanted to stay here and live here. And I think people got a taste of that something when they saw all of these videos of the brave things that people were doing. People fell in love with Ukraine [...] All the stories of people helping each other and people taking such great risks and, you know, making Molotov cocktails together. And maybe you saw that video of the guy with a cigarette in his mouth, carrying a mine off the road with his bare hands, all of these little things. I don't know. You don't see people do things like that. It's very unique to here. And of course, that's not the kind of stuff we saw during Peace Corps, but during Peace Corps, it was different. It was such generosity and hospitality and being almost adopted into these families.*

Jason likewise describes small acts of care and solidarity during *Maidan* as indicative of Ukraine's potential as a nation: "How people just cared for each other, how the people helped each other [...] People were driving from all over the country to them to bring tires, to light the fires, to keep the *Berkut* - the state police - away from the protesters." Seeing these concrete acts of solidarity convinced him of, "the potential in the country and the people here. I feel like in the US, we're going down. Whereas in Ukraine it's going up." Kelly views Ukrainians' resistance to Russian military aggression as something that has not only further convinced her of Ukraine's potential, but also shown it to an international audience through news coverage: "I think people are kind of invested in Ukraine now. People want to see Ukraine succeed."

The non-RPCVs interviewed for this study seem to reflect Kelly's observation that people are moved by what they see of Ukraine during the war. Dylan was initially compelled by basic moral outrage in response to news coverage. He did not plan to engage with Ukraine long term, but after his first trip it became a regular part of his life. He is energized by, "the unanimity throughout the country - because we would go from [city to city] and everything in between. And you would talk to people, and you would get the same response, no matter what, if it's a big city or a little city. And it was nice to see a solidarity like that." Conversational interaction rituals in Ukraine left him feeling emotionally charged, motivated, and part of a cause. Although Lonny does not express particular emotional attachment to Ukraine compared to his other projects, the micro-level solidarity with fundraising partners, diasporans, and refugees has affected his perception of Ukrainians: "I've learned that they certainly believe that they live in a sovereign nation. I believe that they are a very tenacious people who are not over-awed by authority." Like Nadia, he finds inspiration in the convictions of people proximal to him. However, as discussed previously, non-RPCVs without a strong sense of belonging understand their actions differently than RPCVs. Belonging makes helping Ukraine a necessity among RPCVs, such that they do it even when low on money, busy raising small children or navigating family losses, facing job uncertainty, and other conditions that make volunteering and donating inconvenient. In contrast, the non-RPCVs, especially those who recently retired, were all looking for impactful ways to use their time and skills when they decided to take action in support of Ukraine.

Counterpoint 1: General Morality and US-Centered Solidarity Motivations

The analysis above centers Americans' feelings toward Ukraine in explaining what motivates their acts of solidarity. After all, RPCVs often refer to love when characterizing their relationship with Ukraine or motivations to help Ukraine. At the same time, this study

acknowledges that their motivations are also shaped by their feelings toward the USA and self-understandings as Americans. It is impossible to separate experiences of sojourning as US Peace Corps Volunteers from the context of the USA being (until 2025) one of the largest funders of international aid and development efforts. Similarly, US involvement in conflict and defense as a weapons supplier and member of international bodies like NATO and the UN Security Council likely impacts how Americans view US responsibility and capacity to address Russia's attacks on Ukraine. This study does not attempt to disentangle the transnational from the national, but rather looks at how they intertwine. Overall, while many interviewees give US-centered or universalistic moral reasons why supporting Ukraine is something Americans should do, these are not the primary nor sole motivators, but rather complementary ones. Among non-RPCVs, such convictions can give an initial impetus toward action, but time spent in Ukraine or with Ukrainians creates direct emotional connections that help sustain involvement over time.

US-related reasons to support Ukraine given by RPCVs and non-RPCVs alike can be roughly grouped into three types: 1. The US benefits from supporting Ukraine; 2. The US made commitments to Ukraine;[127] and 3. The US is not the nation it claims to be if it does not support Ukraine. Especially among RPCVs, reasons in the first two categories are not given as primary motivations, but rather ways to logically scaffold their emotional reactions and convince others to support Ukraine. For example, Brendan refers to his personal commitment and care for people in Ukraine alongside what he calls a "*realpolitik*" strategic argument that appeals to those unmoved by humanitarianism. Jordan describes trying to appeal to others' "selfishness and help them to understand, not why Ukraine is important in its own right, but why it would be important for the American economy," then contrasts this by asserting, "I mean to me, it's important,

[127] A commonly referenced obligation is the Budapest Memorandum of 1994.

because I actually spent time in Ukraine, and I spent time with the Ukrainian people, and I think that I have a unique understanding when it comes to Americans of why Ukraine is such a special place." Mark researched historical, political, and economic arguments to reconcile his internal conflict between having a "personal connection" and wanting to "stick up for" Ukraine versus an ideal of being able to "look at this objectively" and have reasoned arguments with people who disagree. Having consulted diverse sources of information, he finds that, "even when I take my personal emotions away […] I see the reasoning behind it, and that's why I go and support." He is cautious about acting on emotions, so more broadly applicable arguments can both convince others and make him feel reasonable about going "where my heart is taking me" – to Ukraine.

Perhaps more motivating than benefits to or obligations of the US are convictions about what the US is meant to be, and what Americans are meant to do. Some RPVCs have had affirming experiences, like Mark advocating alongside Ukrainian immigrants in Congress:

> *One of my most incredible experiences was a couple years ago when we participated in the American Coalition Ukraine Action Summit for the first time. I was sitting in our Senator's office with a Ukrainian who immigrated here with his family, had been here for several years. He was sitting in that office telling his story, and as an American watching a Ukrainian do that, I felt honored. I said, 'This is what my country is about. This is what I'm proud of.' A Ukrainian can be sitting here in the office speaking with a Senator and telling his story.*

Others describe disappointment and anger at what they feel to be a betrayal of US values. When Liz's host family members were in distress and asking her why the US was not stepping in to halt Russia's attacks, she not only shared their disappointment in the US government, but felt implicated herself as somebody who had represented the US through her service:

> *I agreed with them and conferred, and all that kind of stuff. But then I also felt a deep measure of disappointment myself. We go to the country, especially as a Peace Corps Volunteer, you go somewhere, and you're teaching English, but you're also to some extent selling American culture […] I think every Peace Corps volunteer has to deal*

> *with that element of Peace Corps in their own kind of way […] And so if we're going to sell a country on our vision and all that, and trying to get them to align with the so-called 'West' or all these different things, and then, when push comes to shove, you're not going to be there to back them up like, what does that say?*

Megan explicitly states the answer Liz's question implies: "I think that everything that's happened in Ukraine has shown that we don't abide by our word." Lonny also expresses doubt about the authenticity of fundamental national values: "It puzzles me when some people in the US are not incensed. I'm like, 'So that's the whole premise of our country: self-determination, right?' It's hard for me to reconcile patriotism for the US without a commitment to sovereign borders and even self-determination elsewhere." For Lonny, the founding principle of the USA has little meaning if not upheld for other countries. Doubt in the "whole premise of our country" is an existential matter for a nation – something Melissa relays with urgency:

> *I think there's a moral injury to the United States as a people when we become so cruel and callous. It hurts us as a nation. It's tricky right now with the United States, because we're basically imploding on multiple fronts. So, it's not just Ukraine, but by abandoning Ukraine, that is one of the fronts by which we are becoming less of a world power. We're abandoning an ally. We're showing weakness. We're showing callousness. We're showing that we're a failing country.*

For many Americans, supporting Ukraine defends both Ukraine and the US. Dylan notes this confluence in how people around him have increasingly incorporated support for Ukraine into their opposition to the Trump administration, a regime many see as threatening US democracy. While there are literal dimensions of defense in terms of US political adversaries, the dimension that seems to compel people most is defending the nation's shared meaning and purpose.

RPCVs vary in how they feel about the United States. For some, like Mark who feels proud while witnessing democracy in a nation of immigrants from within a Senate office, or Dev who describes a career in international development as sharing the best of the US with others,

loving Ukraine and loving the US go together. For others, loving Ukraine goes along with a profound rejection of the US. Raquel says she never felt American in the first place, and is most at home in her second Peace Corps country, Benin. Jason is counting down the time until he is eligible to get Ukrainian citizenship, and is tempted to burn his US passport when he does. Kelly has a Ukrainian flag at home, but has never had an American one. "I'm not proud of the US. I never really have been. But with Ukraine, I feel national pride." Such a divergence is not surprising. Kallman finds Peace Corps Volunteers tend to shift their sentiments about the USA in one of two directions after service, becoming either "patriotic" or "disaffected" cosmopolitans.[128] While such a dynamic is observable among Ukraine RPCVs, Kallman's study focused on how sojourning impacts people's relationships to the USA, rather than their relationship with the country of sojourn. In the case of Ukraine, "disaffected" and "patriotic" cosmopolitans alike have all rallied around a nation – and that nation is the one of their sojourn, their "second home" toward which they maintain an orientation: Ukraine.

[128] Kallman, "Dimensions of Cosmopolitanism," 196–97.

Interlude: "It's Starting"

I was at the university library [...] My roommate [...] texted me, saying, "It's starting."
~Brendan

I was freaking out. I was talking to some of my gaming friends, and I just remember I said to one of them, "It started."
~Kelly

I woke up for some reason at 5:00 AM. I never wake up that early, but something just made me wake up that early. And I had a bunch of messages, and I remember one from my really good friend in the US saying, "It's happening."
~Jason

I get a text from my mom, and in the text she's like, "Oh, my gosh! You won't believe what happened. I can't believe this has happened!" and I go, "No, no, there's no way. You're just reading some tabloid. There's no way this has actually happened." I open up Instagram, and I go to the story of one of my best friends in Ukraine, and he has maybe a dozen slides on his story, just showing video footage of rockets falling on Kyiv.
~Jordan

We knew the invasion was coming because the US had pulled the Ambassador out, and a close friend of ours from our service who had married a Ukrainian, they'd had a son, he was living here in Kyiv. I remember getting on the phone [...] and I go, "Danny, you need to get out. Danny, you need to get Alex and Irina out of there."
~Dev

Alla was very lucky. She got out before the invasion. She was actually in the air. She had left the Kyiv airport. She took the train up to Kyiv, and she left the Kyiv airport two hours before the airport was bombed.
~Raquel

On the night of the invasion, or the day, I was texting my host family, and I just remember they were telling me what was going on, and then my host sister was just asking, "Where is the United States? Where? Where? Who is letting this happen?"
~Liz

"Just trying to be there for people" - From Trauma to Collective Action

It is important to begin this section by acknowledging that interview subjects were hesitant to center their own emotional responses to Russia's attacks on Ukraine. Several caveated their stories by noting that many people have experienced much graver dangers and losses than they have. The direct impacts of war trauma in Ukraine merit significantly more research than can be accomplished here, and are not the focus. Instead, the present study examines a distinctly transnational instance of experiencing and witnessing trauma to consider its role in driving solidarity actions. Line of Inquiry 2 investigates the following questions: What is the role of trauma (if any) in collective mobilization among Ukraine RPCVs, and does it differ in comparison to Americans with no sojourn history?

This study theoretically builds on Hutchison's concept of long-distance trauma by considering how social fields and simultaneity alter the effects of distance, and empirically expands on Levitt & Glick Schiller's theory of transnational belonging by applying it to sojourners rather than immigrants. Most significantly, this section focuses on the ways trauma and pain can drive people together and encourage collective action. Notably, this analysis finds different emotional responses to the invasion among people who sojourned in Ukraine compared to those without such a background, although RPCVs and non-RPCVs alike show the inclinations Ahmed and Hutchison note about the desire to bear witness in times of suffering.

<u>Ruptured Reality, Tainted Memories, Violated Boundaries</u>

> *"A lot of the missiles come out of [Russian-occupied city] now [...] When you see all this destruction, they're usually being shot from [there]. So it's just really weird, because a lot of the pain is being centered - you know, it's launching from [that city]. And that's a really weird reality."* ~Megan, RPCV

RPCVs' recollections of the invasion express the main impacts and mobilizing mechanisms of pain and trauma. Among these impacts are the disruption of one's sense of reality and self. Hutchison notes that such impacts can occur even from afar: "Whether it is experienced immediately or witnessed from a safe distance, trauma is an encounter with something so terrifying that it plunges those who experience it into a world of uncertainty and fear [...] One's normal sense of reality seems ruptured."[129] For RPCVs such uncertainty is tied directly to acute worries that people they know might be killed at any moment. Jordan, who was traveling when the full-scale invasion started, remembers, "one of the longest two-hour spans of my life was that flight [...] because I had no service, and in my head I'm thinking, "Oh my God! All of my friends are dead! There's no way I'm ever going to see them again." Kelly recalls, "I was so afraid that if I stopped looking at my phone, something really terrible was going to happen." Reality became so uncertain that even brief periods of time without proof one's friends were alive was terrifying. Brendan witnessed this immediate fear of death among former students: "One of my campers who I taught, she posted on Instagram, saying, "A girl my age died on a park bench I sit on all the time - that could have been me." In reality altered by war, the familiar is now deathly, and the assumption of continued existence from one moment to the next is gone.

The dangers of this war-altered reality are keenly felt, yet beyond comprehension. As Hutchison explains, traumatic experiences, "are so horrific and confronting that they belie one's ability to comprehend them," and people "are unable to reconcile their experiences with practices and memories that they are accustomed to."[130] Such irreconcilability is clear in Liz's recollection of being, "in shock" because, "the idea that there was a column of a hundred tanks that got

[129] Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma*, 2016, 38.
[130] Hutchison, 38.

stopped near my town, and the idea that this little town of 10,000 people had a column of that many tanks and artillery [...] I had a really hard time conceptualizing or rationalizing that in my mind." Her experiences and memories in the small town make news about Russian tanks approaching it harder to comprehend; the tanks are like Uehling's "everyday sci-fi." Many RPCVs echo this "sense that the world [...] had become strange."[131] Both RPCVs whose communities are under Russian occupation use the word "weird." Melissa describes the flurry of sending money and finding evacuation routes while Russian troops took over as, "a weird time." For Megan, it is a "weird reality" that her city is a base for Russian attacks. News of airstrikes across Ukraine not only show harm in the places targeted, but assert that a place she remembers living is now employed for killing. While Brendan's student grapples with a familiar park bench being a site of death, Megan grabbles with a beloved place becoming a bringer of such death.

The irreconcilability of reality with one's prior understanding of the world compounds traumatic disorientation by changing how people experience their own memories. When recalling his arrival to Ukraine - before any interview questions about the war - Jason stated, "I remember getting to the hotel in [the city] - the one that got blown up." His memory of arriving to the hotel is no longer reconcilable with reality, because it has been destroyed by a missile. After that brief intrusion of the present into the past, he continued his story. Megan describes such intrusions as corruptions; her memory of holiday fireworks in Ukraine, "was a really wonderful memory I had before it got corrupted by the war […] the fireworks were coming out of one of the Russian ships. It's a warship now. So it's just crazy, because my memories were good memories. And now they're corrupted." The troops launching weapons from the warship

[131] Uehling, *Everyday War*, 125.

have invaded both her city and her memories of it. Trauma makes the present incomprehensible, and warps the threads of memory that constitute one's points of attachment to the world.

RPCVs describe experiences of violation and severing of attachments that reflect Ahmed's concept of pain rending collective bodies. After returning to the US, Melissa invested in a Ukrainian friend's business "based on the model of Curves for Women, a non-judgmental women's exercise space. And it was occupied by Russian soldiers who now use it as their gym, and I feel like this is a violation of our positive women-only space by just the worst thing I can imagine." Melissa's story exemplifies pain as violation of space – specifically a space that forms connective tissue between herself, her friend, and women of the community. Ahmed draws on Scarry to explain that, "pain involves the violation or transgression of the border between inside and outside" and thereby "creates the desire to re-establish the border, to push out the pain, or the (imagined, material) object we feel is the 'cause' of the pain."[132] Accordingly, Melissa asserts, "I want Russia out of [the city]." Russian soldiers' violation of the women's gym mirrors Russia's violation of Ukraine's borders; both acts puncture the surface of a collective body, and Melissa wants them expelled so the body can be restored. However, war makes such restoration harder by severing social attachments. Melissa notes that people who have left her city and those who have stayed are "very cut off from each other." She cannot send care packages because occupation authorities refuse international mail. For Megan, this cutting off results from surveillance; she cannot initiate conversations with friends in occupied territories because they could be arrested or beaten by authorities who monitor their phones. This severing of ties between individuals tears at what Ahmed calls "the skin of the community." [133] While Ahmed

[132] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 27.
[133] Ahmed, 34.

describes such harm in a different context (state abductions of Indigenous children), the impact of severing attachments to destroy and dominate a community is similar.

RPCVs also feel severing of ties with physical places to which they might not be able to return, or which have been permanently altered. Melissa says, “I know that I'm not really suffering, but I do feel like I've experienced a loss. [This city] was a second home to me, a place I really loved, and I don't know that I'll ever be able to go there again.” Nadia, who never visited her community of service after finishing, wonders, “Why didn't I go back? Especially after the city was destroyed. Why didn't I go back when I had the chance?” For Megan, conceding any territory to Russia, “means you can never go back. You can never go back to your hometown.” This pain of separation, both felt directly in the possibility of never being able to return to places they know, and witnessed through the painful separation of Ukrainian friends and family members, is felt in the tearing apart of the social ties that RPCVs developed during service. It occurs as well even for RPCVs in Ukraine, whose friends have left and whose social lives are limited by curfews and air raid alerts. Kelly says, “it's going to be painful here for a long time. I don't think that we can ever expect - it will never be like it was before.” Bonds of family and community, and to places in which those bonds arose, are precisely the attachments that war has altered. “The experience of pain - the experience of being stabbed by a foreign object that pierces the skin - is bound up with what cannot be recovered, with something being taken away that cannot be returned. The loss is, in some sense, the loss of a ‘we,’ the loss of a community.”[134] This “we” makes RPCV experiences of the war different from those of people who might be moved by news of people’s suffering, but for whom there is no “we” to be lost.

[134] Ahmed, 39.

Transnational belonging during a traumatic experience creates a distinct dilemma not accounted for in Hutchison's idea that equates witnessing trauma "from a safe distance"[135] with being "safely detached."[136] This distance can become its own source of pain and disorientation for people with a high degree of transnational connectedness, because in an atmosphere of simultaneity - being here and there at once – people still have duties of care. They are still neighbors, friends, and members of the family. Seeing the war through their loved ones' eyes, hearing about it through their messages, witnessing fear in real time at the consequences that may occur, make the war feel close. It feels immediate because one's friends might die at any instant. Distance in such circumstance makes one physically safe, but renders one less able to act, and isolated because people in the immediate physical surroundings may not share the same experience. The surrounding people are 'here' but not 'there' – and the most urgent needs are 'there.' RPCVs therefore frequently describe feeling "cut off," "helpless," and "overwhelmed" in the early days of the full-scale war. Allison, who was especially close to her host family, felt that, "My friends and Ukrainian family were so far away. Yeah, helpless is the biggest word since the war has started." The ability to help cannot span distance the way feelings do. Some RPCVs even describe the early days of the invasion not only in emotional terms, but physical ones. Danielle shares that, "We were sick, physically sick. I had never experienced anything like that before. I was shocked, amazed how my body could physically get sick about something happening so far away." Even from the USA, she physically felt the impact of harms inflicted upon the surface of a collective body built through her social ties and memories in Ukraine. This collective body remained unnoticed while it was intact, but became felt again through pain.

[135] Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma*, 2016, 39.
[136] Hutchison, 201.

Danielle's illness in response to the invasion made her feel, even in her own body, her attachments to Ukraine. This is a distinctly different experience than what Hutchison describes among people who witness trauma only through media coverage and can feel the victims to be "others." It also contributes to the paradox discussed in the next section.

Pain Paradox: The Unspeakable as a Basis for Community

> *"It's very difficult to explain it to an American who does not have a Ukraine experience, because, you know, people asking, 'Oh, do you have any people you still talk to in Ukraine?' I'm like, 'Yeah, I do. They're my students. They're getting bombed.'"*
> ~Brendan, RPCV

> *"We have so much shared experience in what we've dealt with over the last three years [...] We can refer to things or the challenges and just understand."*
> ~Nadia, RPCV

The paradoxical nature of pain and trauma is that such incommunicable experiences are deeply isolating, yet drive people toward one another to bear witness, be witnessed, and build shared meanings. After the comment above about his students being bombed, Brendan stated, "it was very hard for me to successfully articulate myself or fully explain how this was impacting me." Notably, this difficulty emerged when talking to people without "a Ukraine experience." After Danielle shared her story of becoming physically ill from the invasion, Mark added, "They don't understand locally," because people fail to grasp the impact of their time in Ukraine: "I didn't just take a vacation there [...] I engaged in the community [...] I had a fear for my friends and their families." Megan describes "shutting down" when talking with "unsympathetic Americans" about the war. In contrast to Americans without a Ukraine experience who are "unsympathetic" or "don't understand," Nadia finds mutual understanding among fellow Ukraine RPCVs, which has grown deeper since the war: "I had not been involved with the RPCV community at all [...] I related more to the [Ukrainian] NGO people than I did to other

RPCVs. But now that's changed [...] We have so much shared experience in what we've dealt with over the last three years [...] We can refer to things or the challenges and just understand." Nadia's experience exemplifies Hutchison's observation that trauma tends to make people, "seek out (or attempt to restore) a community that is capable of understanding and ameliorating the immanent sense of shock and dislocation."[137] Liz similarly sought community by tracking down Ukrainians with whom she had lost contact, and joining Peace Corps virtual service to make new Ukrainian connections. This desire for a community of understanding helps explain Levitt and Glick Schiller's theory that crisis can trigger a shift from "being" to "belonging" in transnational social fields. For many RPCVs, the connectedness to Ukraine that makes the pain of war so hard to talk about also makes them feel bonded to one another and to Ukrainians, and forms a basis for building shared meanings amid chaos. RPCVs who are in Ukraine also show an inclination to connect with Ukrainians through experiencing the war together, demonstrating Ahmed's assertions about "the sociality of pain." According to Ahmed, "love is often conveyed by wanting to feel the loved one's pain," even if pain can never fully be shared or understood."[138] Dev was not in Ukraine at the start of the invasion, but finds meaning in being there now:

> *Obviously, I don't face the same amount of physical danger as Ukrainians do on a day-to-day basis, especially ones that live in the suburbs and exurbs of [the city], but at the same time, they know I'm here. I was with them during the war. I was having the same sleepless nights they were having. I was having to deal with the same missile attacks [...] there's kind of a shared bond in going through this suffering together.*

Being in Ukraine cultivates understanding that does not need to be spoken. Nobody has to tell Dev about the missiles that came in overnight; everyone arrives to work knowing they all

[137] Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma*, 2016, 51.
[138] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 29.

experienced it. While he cannot feel his Ukrainian friends' pain for them, he can share pain alongside them, bearing witness at the closest possible proximity while working for a common purpose. For Kelly, shared experiences give new meaning to the job she already had before the invasion. After spending sleepless nights sheltering in metro stations, and watching students dive under their desks during attacks, she feels how English lessons provide moments of "something else to think about" and relief from the trauma of war; a bit of co-created order against broken reality, with a sense of purpose that is deeply shared precisely because everybody present has experienced, in their own way, the pain of hiding from missiles - and shown up to class anyway.

RPCVs rapidly came together in response to trauma using existing mobilizing structures, like RPCV membership organizations and cohort-based chat groups and mailing lists. An emergency online meeting was organized by the RPCV Alliance for Ukraine within two days of the invasion, and the new RPCV social media group focused on Ukraine rapidly climbed to over one thousand members vetted by a Ukraine RPCV administrator team. Once people came together, shared connections and experiences in Ukraine further shaped mobilizing structures and practices for collective action. One such structure was by service community: Brendan helped organize a group of RPCVs who had all completed training in the same village, which suffered severe damage early in the invasion. "We contacted my host parents, who put me in contact with their son, who also put us in contact with the mayor of the village, and we helped fundraise money to get them a generator and some tools." Familiar mobilization practices were employed as well, like fundraising and grants. Mark partnered with NGOs to get medical supplies and volunteered with a new RPCV grants program, stating, "those tools that Peace Corps gave us […] how to approach people, how to fundraise, how to engage in grants, how to engage in NGOs […] we started using those and started building on that." Nadia describes navigating a

transnational word-of-mouth network between her contacts in Ukraine, their friends in the US, and multiple organizations to get tactical first aid kits as "so Peace Corps-ish," because she had to figure out something new while relying on a personal trust network. While undertaking these actions, RPCVs found encouragement and support from others. Nadia felt inspired when a former Peace Corps Ukraine director helped promote the fundraising campaigns of various RPVCs, including hers. Mark and Danielle have worked on projects launched by fellow RPCVs, and Danielle even says, "I've made this war and standing up for Ukraine my full time job." Together, Ukraine RPCVs and their Ukrainian friends and colleagues have developed new interaction rituals to maintain attachments and overcome feelings of helplessness by taking and witnessing action. As noted in the Theoretical Framework, interaction rituals entail being together and having a shared object of attention and mood. Collins acknowledges these can happen online as well as in person.[139] Online interaction rituals arose like posting news and advice, mourning the destruction of familiar places, sharing memories, and coordinating and celebrating actions like evacuations and supply deliveries. Jordan spent a lot of time in such groups, where he redirected stress by focusing on evacuation logistics, and also appreciated:

> *being able to just talk with other RPCVs about a lot of the stuff that was happening, because clearly, on TV, we were seeing places that we knew and held dear to our hearts being struck by rockets and in states that we couldn't even imagine, and it was just really great to be able to talk to each other about good memories that we had [...] even when rockets were falling.*

Megan likewise finds comfort in sharing memories from Ukraine with people who know what she is talking about, like visiting a champagne factory that is now destroyed, or mundane trips to pizza parlors and movie theaters in what are now combat zones. Especially given the way trauma

[139] Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*.

ruptures reality and intrudes upon memories, sharing memories with people who can affirm them provides an anchoring sense that the remembered places existed, reconstructing the "skin of the community" damaged by pain. Hutchison writes that, "a common response is to mourn trauma in ways that reinstate previous notions of normality."[140] Even if such normality can never be regained, one's *attachments* to beloved people and places that are now gone can feel intact in the company of others who remember. In their communal environment, RPCVs both share old memories and find new ways to organize action with a common purpose, doing what Hutchison describes as coming, "together by giving voice, bearing witness to, and making new – collective and forward-looking – meanings out of each other's pain."[141] The war disrupted their usual ways of being the friends and neighbors they became in Ukraine, so they collectively built new ways to perform those roles with a sense of purpose that sustains and even deepens their connections.

The ability to "just understand" shared meanings is a core feature of social movements. In discussing social movement research, Della Porta describes the importance of surfacing what goes unsaid, because things that are tacitly understood bind people together and shed light on their motivations.[142] For the present research, surfacing such understandings required asking questions an "unsympathetic American" might ask, like why the war in Ukraine matters or how it has impacted communities where RPCVs served. The need to explain what is usually taken for granted elicited agitated responses from some interviewees, an effect likely related to the fact that the researcher is a Ukraine RPCV expected to understand. These moments of tension were smoothed over by caveating that interview questions might seem "obvious" or even "stupid," as

[140] Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma*, 2016, 46.
[141] Hutchison, 248.
[142] Della Porta, *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research*, 232.

a way to acknowledge the taken-for-grantedness of shared meanings and explain that putting them into words was simply a need imposed by research.

Though they do not express the traumatic disorientation shown by RPCVs, non-RPCVs in this study still display a compulsion to understand others' pain. Two of them have traveled to Ukraine since the invasion, visiting sites of suffering in addition to performing aid work. Roger was shown a basement where civilians were detained in poor conditions by Russian forces for so long that some died. He contrasted the visit to past experiences at World War II concentration camps where memorials were "kind of sanitized," but the basement remained untouched: "I got to see firsthand what it must have been like [...] and that had a profound effect on me." The custodian who guided Roger explained, "he wanted America to know what the Russians did," encouraging Roger to share the story. Roger has since spoken publicly about Ukraine to gather support, as has Dylan: "We remind them of what's going on, what the Ukrainian people are suffering through." Dylan finds stories most effective when pain overlaps with the familiar—like children making chalk art around bullet holes or playing in inflatable bouncy houses used to coax them from basement hideouts for medical checkups. "People can relate to that - seeing their own kids play in bouncy houses. They've seen their own kids do chalk art […] it makes it something they can touch." Roger's and Dylan's witnessing of suffering helps them move American audiences – but unlike RPCVs, they had to travel to the pain rather than feeling it immediately in a connected web of transnational simultaneity. The village where Roger visited the basement was familiar to many RPCVs; for them, its descent from the mundane to the horrible was a "weird reality" felt in real time, rather than a historical event preserved for the sake of relaying pain.

Roger's and Dylan's actions align with Hutchison's concept of long-distance trauma as it is usually deployed in international humanitarian work, where storytelling and imagery establish

"the obligation to help distant strangers in times of dire need."[143] Hutchison both critiques and acknowledges the effectiveness (at least short term) of media campaigns that show vulnerable women and children as "international 'symbols of distress'" while appealing to western-centric desires to feel empowered.[144] For Roger, images of fleeing children initially spurred his involvement: "With the Ukrainian situation it's mostly women and children, you know [...] just something about seeing little girls going through this…" He became tearful at this point in the interview, referencing his own lack of daughters and joy at a new granddaughter. While Hutchison critiques tropes of vulnerability for creating a "politics of pity" that detaches helpers from victims and denies the agency of those impacted,[145] Roger's visit to Ukraine suggests a desire to overcome this effect. He visited the hometown of Ukrainian refugee "family members that we've gotten very close to and whom we love [...] their homes, their apartments, their neighborhood." American volunteers like Roger did not have host family ties or second homes like RPCVs, but some such ties are beginning to develop.

To return to the question posed by this line of inquiry – trauma appears to have played a significant role in collective mobilization among Ukraine RPCVs, for the reasons theorized by Ahmed and Hutchison. Witnessing the trauma of war disrupted the sense of normalcy for many RPCVs, and they responded by seeking out others and taking action. The experiences of trauma RPCVs describe are not demonstrated by non-RPCVs, who are understandably troubled by what they see happening in Ukraine, but do not experience the stark rupturing of reality or the feeling of being unable to explain their pain to others. This difference in experiences of what, for most interviewees, is "long-distance trauma" from outside of Ukraine points to the impact of

[143] Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma*, 2016, 185.
[144] Hutchison, 195.
[145] Hutchison, 201.

belonging developed during sojourn, such that Ukraine RPCVs feel connected to the families and communities under attack, and a strangeness and disorientation from the war in Ukraine because they know and remember how Ukraine is "supposed to" be. Furthermore, their collective actions started immediately because of existing mobilizing structures and practices facilitated by in-group trust built on shared experience. Non-RPCVs required more time to mobilize, some not taking their first actions until 2023, because they needed to build networks like those Ukraine RPCVs already had. Non-RPCV mobilizing structures, such as community charitable organizations, first had to connect to people in or from Ukraine to become effective. However, RPCVs and non-RPCVs alike became enmeshed in a network-of-networks that facilitated their involvement and reinforced a common purpose of supporting Ukraine.

Counterpoint 2: Conventional Responses to News of Suffering

Both Ahmed and Hutchison study how mass media relays trauma to large audiences, who might then feel compelled to respond. This counterpoint therefore considers the possibility that Ukraine RPCVs might respond similarly to any upsetting disaster or conflict relayed in news media, and their responses would be driven in largely the same way as those among Americans with no sojourn history. However, their own affirmations contest this. Recall that Nadia finds herself better able to "personalize" what is happening in Ukraine compared to contemporary events she witnesses elsewhere, because she lived in Ukraine. She can send donations to other causes, but her personal volunteer efforts are most focused on Ukraine. Mark and Danielle mentioned following news about violence in Gaza, Syria, and Myanmar, and despite being moved by those events, they were surprised by the particular intensity of their emotional response to Russia's war on Ukraine, and continue to focus efforts there. The evidence of this

analysis therefore indicates that deep connectedness to a country, built in this case through sojourn, does impact how people experience and witness traumatic events in that country.

An additional aspect of this counterpoint notes the challenges of engaging with others' pain and trauma. As discussed in Counterpoint 1 about US-centered motivations for solidarity, some Americans view the war in Ukraine as an existential matter for US nationhood and global stability, and support for Ukraine has become part of opposition against isolationism and authoritarianism in the current US regime. In this sense, it is possible that some Americans might appropriate Ukraine's ongoing trauma as an indicator of US or global problems (reflecting Ahmed's concern about appropriation of pain),[146] or respond to Russia's attacks on Ukraine by affirming existing unequal power structures to restore what has been disrupted (reflecting Hutchison's concern about seeking comfort in a status quo that gave rise to problems in the first place).[147] The latter concern is a challenge when seeking support for Ukraine from people skeptical of entities like NATO and the EU – something Jordan navigates in his work. While the fates of the US and Ukraine indeed seem intertwined at a pivotal moment, and these connections can be leveraged to build common cause, ongoing efforts to listen to Ukrainians and be open to unforeseen ways Ukraine may develop is important for transnational allies.

[146] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 21.
[147] Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma*, 2016, 245.

Conclusion

The main question of this thesis asks: Why have so many Ukraine RPCVs mobilized and continued to support Ukrainian causes in response to military invasion by Russia? What drives their solidarity, and is it different for people who have not sojourned in Ukraine? Put simply, the answer is that a lot of Ukraine RPCVs love Ukraine and want it to keep existing as a nation. Its nationhood matters to them on an emotional level influenced by their time there as sojourners, differentiating their experiences of the war and motivations to respond from those of people with no sojourning history. While RPCVs and non-RPCVs share similar convictions about broadly applicable morality, stability of international borders, and the importance of the US upholding its own commitments and values, for RPCVs these motivations exist alongside and perhaps secondarily to their distinct emotional and social connections with Ukraine as a second home. Being connected in this way makes Russia's attacks feel especially personal and painful. In comparison, Americans without a sojourn background who have mobilized in support of Ukraine do not have such connectedness, because they were never embedded in a relational setting that could cultivate it. However, as Brubaker notes, there are various ways people can form affiliations. Non-RPCVs base solidarity partly on commonality – things they feel they have in common with Ukrainians – as well as their moral and political convictions. The insights developed on the way to these main findings, and their implications for theory and practice, are discussed below.

Key Findings

Line of Inquiry 1: Belonging and Connectedness in a Transnational Relational Setting

Line of Inquiry 1 pursued the sub-question: How do the relational setting and emotional experiences of volunteering in Ukraine, particularly given its active post-independence nation

building, drive solidarity through feelings of connectedness and belonging? This inquiry tested Heaney's supposition that relational settings with circulating emotion and a consistent "notion of nationhood" can cultivate attachment to a nation. This study provides affirmative evidence of this process and its outcome, and shows that national attachments can develop relatively quickly under certain circumstances. For Ukraine RPCVs, these circumstances included a sojourning program that emphasized social relationships and work in nation-building institutions, and Ukraine's context as a newly independent country undergoing major transformation. Although this research began with a focus on volunteers' work and exposure to affectively charged mass events like revolutions, it also found that host family and friendship ties and routine interactions were extremely important, indicating the significance not just of "communities of feeling" at large affective events, but also routine "interaction rituals" and micro-solidarity networks. These networks helped form a basis for solidarity with Ukraine and shape later mobilizing structures.

This inquiry next explored how belonging and connectedness manifest transnationally and shape experiences of the ongoing war through simultaneity. Ukraine RPCVs describe the war feeling immediate and ever-present, and this simultaneity also manifests in the continuation of connections and self-understandings like being a part of the family or being a neighbor. While simultaneity in experiencing the war was anticipated, simultaneity in social roles was an unexpected insight. It builds on Watson's finding that returned volunteers feel transnationalism more through roles and relationships, rather than individual identity as she originally supposed, and that future research should examine social aspects of transnationalism.[148] Here, roles are approached under the broader concepts of connectedness and self-understandings, which align when, for example, one feels connected to a community and feels oneself having a meaningful

[148] Watson, "Three Bases of Identity in Global Context," 84.

role in it. This study's findings regarding connectedness, self-understanding, and commonality attest to the analytical utility of these alternatives to "identity." Disaggregating "identity" provides vocabulary for the differences between RPCVs and non-RPCVs, elucidating nuances of varying bases for solidarity and the impacts of sojourn.

Line of Inquiry 2: Trauma, Mobilizing Opportunities, and Collective Action

Line of Inquiry 2 explored the sub-question: What is the role of trauma (if any) in collective mobilization among Ukraine RPCVs, and does it differ in comparison to Americans with no sojourn history? The analysis shows that many RPCVs at least secondarily experience trauma as witnesses to the war. This trauma functions as expected per Hutchison's theory of about constituting community: Ukraine RPCVs felt a profoundly disrupted reality due to the invasion, which was hard to share with people who lacked connections to Ukraine. They therefore sought the company of other Ukraine RPCVs and their Ukrainian contacts, and in so doing built shared meanings through collective action and new interaction rituals. This analysis not only documents in former sojourners the being-to-belonging shift that Levitt and Glick-Schiller conceptualized when studying migration, but also highlights distinct ways trauma impacts people transnationally. Hutchison's discussion of long-distance trauma and transnational responses to crisis addresses people mobilized by media to help strangers "from a safe distance," and critiques such media for a "politics of pity" that maintains a gap between empowered helpers and disempowered victims. Hutchison's analysis partially applies to non-RPCVs, who were moved through such mechanisms and sometimes employ them, but have also sought to overcome the gap by going to Ukraine and building friendships. In contrast, "long-distance trauma" does not quite apply to Ukraine RPCVs, for whom distance creates additional elements of trauma and pain. In a social field defined by connectedness and simultaneity, time and distance are warped

such that Ukraine RPCVs feel almost as if the war is *here*, but are inhibited in witnessing and responding to the pain of their loved ones because it is *there*. One can maintain friendships as if time and space do not matter, but one cannot stop a missile that way. The effects of connectedness when witnessing trauma transnationally may have implications for how to support people in such times. This suggestion does not intend to equate witnessing trauma transnationally to experiencing it directly, and acknowledges the importance of prioritizing assistance for people most deeply affected by the violence and loss they have experienced. However, in a highly mobile and transnational world, it is worth considering how connectedness to seemingly faraway places can impact people's responses to traumatic events.

Limitations, Generalizability Considerations, and Avenues for Future Research

What About the Disengaged RPCVs?

The choice to focus on people actively participating in Ukrainian issues is intentional, since this study is driven by the observation that an overwhelming share of Ukraine RPCVs *are* engaged and it would be methodologically challenging to find those who are not. The exclusion of RPCVs who do *not* stay engaged or re-engage does limit generalizability about the impact of Peace Corps service on later transnational engagement. However, future studies could compare people who served in the same country and yet have different levels of engagement afterwards.

Limited Sample of Non-RPCVs

Although efforts were made to recruit diverse non-RPCV Americans involved in Ukrainian causes, reliance on snowball and convenience sampling yielded an interviewee pool comprised entirely of men aged sixty or older. In this sample, being retired and searching for meaningful ways to employ one's time and skills were motivators for solidarity actions with Ukraine, and also meant that people had time and resources to contribute. It is hard to tell

whether this constitutes a generalizable finding about American supporters of Ukraine or is just an artifact of the sample. A mixed-methods study with a representational sample of pro-Ukraine American volunteers could lend further insight.

Attention to Framing

Framing is an important aspect of social movement theory, alongside mobilizing structures and practices. This study focused on the latter two aspects, and due to time and scope limitations did not do much analysis of how Ukraine RPCVs and other Americans frame Russia's invasion of Ukraine or the ways Americans should respond. However, the interviews used here, and ample data from social media, published materials like letters to the editor, and presentations and speeches provide rich data sources for future studies on framings of the war.

Single-Country Scope

This research is limited to a single-country case study. However, further exploring the impacts of sojourn in active nation-building contexts and newly independent countries to generalize beyond Ukraine could be done in countries with comparable histories. For example, contemporary Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia have all experienced challenges to their borders since emerging from the USSR, and have also all hosted Peace Corps Volunteers. Additional case studies or a comparative study could build on the findings in this thesis regarding Ukraine.

An additional dimension of this thesis is the function of trauma and crisis in constituting transnational belonging and driving collective action. This could be tested beyond Ukraine by examining other instances of RPCVs responding to crises in their countries of service. Such cases have occurred in response to natural disasters, civil wars, and regime changes around the world. A comparative study could examine different kinds of crisis and different countries to look for common patterns or mechanisms, and dimensions of difference.

The Impact of Time on Social Spheres and Connectedness

This thesis only captures experiences at a particular point in time and is limited to people who sojourned for two years or longer. However, Levitt and Glick Schiller suggest longitudinal research to capture how, "Transnational practices ebb and flow in response to particular incidents or crises."[149] Follow-up studies of Ukraine RPCVs in the future could be illuminating. Other elements of time might address RPCVs with a longer gap between ending service and the occurrence of a crisis, or who served when there was minimal technology for staying connected. Finally, future studies could include shorter sojourn formats to examine impacts of duration.

Sojourning is Bigger than Peace Corps

This study makes a small contribution to better understanding sojourning as one of many modes of transnationalism by looking at specific processes and mechanisms in a single volunteering program. Generalizing findings will require studying other volunteer programs to clarify whether commonalities exist in similarly structured transnational experiences originating from different national contexts. Next is consideration of other kinds of sojourning apart from volunteering, and other populations of sojourners (for example, diasporans who take birthright trips with a similar structure to Peace Corps service). While the empirical scope of the present study is limited, it has shown how a relational-processual approach surfaces the nuances and impacts of relational setting during and after sojourn. This can enable comparisons of different kinds of sojourn that have yet to be seriously undertaken, and also facilitates studying ongoing experiences and activities of post-sojourners.

[149] Levitt and Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity," 1012–13.

Final Thoughts

Hutchison proposes a "politics of grief" as a way to move forward after trauma.[150] However, it is not clear how grieving can happen under ongoing military aggression. Many studies of collective trauma deal with it after the fact, once it is in the realm of memory. Perhaps it is a task for experts on trauma and conflict to explore how grieving and healing might happen while new wounds are being inflicted. In the meantime, how can people acknowledge each other's pain and enact solidarity in ways that do not fetishize the very harm they seek to overcome? Hutchison emphasizes the importance of building new meanings and working toward transformation.[151] It is not clear how Ukraine and the people connected to it will transform after a war that has not yet ended. Perhaps it is possible to build meaning moment by moment. Uehling's finding that caring relationships persist in war zones, along with stories shared by Ukraine RPCVs, give a glimmer of an answer: care can still thrive in war. For RPCVs, care defined Ukraine before the war, and many see it defining Ukraine now. Perhaps care will go on to define Ukraine in the future.

Nationalism studies scholars will likely continue to debate the goods and ills of loving a nation for a long time to come, but in any case, in response to poet Volodymyr Sosiura's commandment to "Love Ukraine!" - this research gives a resounding reply that Ukraine is loved.

[150] Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma*, 2016, 212.
[151] Hutchison, 239.

Epilogue: The Last Siren

One day there will be a siren, and that will be the last one.
And I was thinking, I want to be here when it's that last one.
But then what comes after it?

~Kelly

Appendices

Appendix A: Peace Corps Ten Core Expectations

1. Prepare my affairs to keep my commitment to serve the full term of my assignment.
2. Build relationships and work alongside community members on locally prioritized projects that promote knowledge exchange and contribute to a lasting impact.
3. Serve where the Peace Corps places me with the flexibility needed for effective service.
4. Collaborate with the local community members on sustainable development work and spend most of my time respectfully integrating into the host community and culture.
5. Accept that during service I am responsible for my personal conduct and professional performance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
6. Treat every human being with dignity and respect.
7. Adhere to the policies and rules of the Peace Corps and the local and national laws of the country where I serve.
8. Exercise judgment and personal responsibility to protect the health, safety, and well-being of myself and others.
9. Recognize that during service I represent the people, cultures, values, and traditions of the United States of America.
10. Promote a better understanding of other cultures by intentionally and ethically sharing my Peace Corps experience with family, friends, and the American public during and after service.

Appendix B: Pre-Interview Questionnaire and Informed Consent Form

Study on Americans' connections with Ukraine: Pre-Interview Questionnaire & Consent Form

This is a pre-interview questionnaire and informed consent form for participating in qualitative research about transnational solidarity with Ukraine among Americans. Thank you for your interest in contributing as an interview subject!

About the Research:

This research is being conducted by Cortney Copeland as an MA student in the Nationalism Studies Program at Central European University. The goal is to explore Americans' motivations for supporting Ukraine through activities like fundraising, advocacy, volunteer work, and professional commitments. It is designed to include people who volunteered in Ukraine with the Peace Corps as well as those who did not. The final thesis paper will be available in CEU's thesis repository after Summer 2025.

What Participating Entails:

If you agree to participate in this study, then you will complete an approximately ~75-minute interview via Zoom, to be scheduled at your convenience between March 4 - April 5, 2025. Participation is voluntary. You have the right to decline to answer any questions or to end the interview early. If you would like to withdraw from the study entirely, this needs to be communicated before you end the interview.

The interview will be recorded for the purpose of ensuring transcription accuracy. The recordings will be viewed only by the researcher. The researcher will analyze the transcribed content of interviews to identify important themes. Content will be presented in the final thesis paper primarily as summaries. Some direct quotes may be used to illustrate key points. No quotes will be attributed to individual interviewees.

Your information will be kept confidential. Although some background information about interviewees will be included in the final paper (for example, number of interviewees by gender, project sector if applicable, years spent in Ukraine, etc.), no published information will be tied to your individual name or identity. Additionally, care will be taken to avoid mentioning individuals, organizations, or places in Ukraine that may be put at risk if identified as collaborating with Americans or resisting Russian occupation.

Given the reality of war in Ukraine and related geopolitical contention, participants may find some portions of the interview to be emotionally intense. However, the discussion will not focus solely on the war, and it is permissible to take short breaks or change topics. On interview day, it is advised that you allow time to decompress before moving from your interview to other commitments.

Please fill out the questionnaire below in order to participate. If you have additional questions, you may email Cortney at copeland_cortney@student.ceu.edu.

1. What is your name? If your preferred name is different than your legal name, please provide your preferred name.

2. Please confirm the best email address for reaching you.

3. In which country do you currently have your primary residence?
This research is limited to people based either in the USA or Ukraine. If you select "other", you will proceed to the form submission screen.
Mark only one oval.

◯ USA *Skip to question 6*
◯ Ukraine *Skip to question 4*
◯ Other

Questions for people in Ukraine

4. When did you begin your current stay in Ukraine?

5. What was your main reason for moving to Ukraine?
You can share a bit about what you do there now, but feel free to keep it short.

Skip to question 8

Questions for people in the USA

6. Which US state/territory is currently your primary residence?

7. Did you serve in Peace Corps Ukraine?
Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes *Skip to question 8*
◯ No *Skip to question 12*

Skip to question 8

Questions for RPCVs

8. What years did you serve in person in Peace Corps Ukraine?

9. In which town/city and oblast did you serve?
If you served in more than one place, please list all. If your town has had its name changed, please note if you are able.

10. What was your Peace Corps Ukraine sector? If you served in more than one

sector, please note all of them.

11. Do you currently work for the Peace Corps?
Note: Current employees of the agency are not included in the study. If you are currently employed at Peace Corps, your form will be completed after this question.
Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes
◯ No *Skip to question 15*

Questions for US-based interviewees

12. How and when did you first get involved in activities connected to Ukraine?
A brief answer is fine - you can share more in the interview.

13. Are you acquainted with any Ukrainian people in the US?
Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes
◯ No

14. Have you ever been to Ukraine in person? If so, select the option that best describes when you first went to Ukraine.
Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes, before 2022
◯ Yes, in 2022 or later
◯ No

Additional Information & Informed Consent

15. Please indicate any concerns about privacy or security that should be taken into consideration regarding what you share in your interview, whether these pertain to yourself or to people you know. This research seeks to avoid jeopardizing the safety of anyone who may be targeted for their activities.

16. Please use the check boxes below to indicate whether you agree with the conditions of the research:

About the Research:
This research is being conducted by Cortney Copeland as an MA student in the Nationalism Studies Program at Central European University. The goal is to explore

Americans' motivations for supporting Ukraine through activities like fundraising, advocacy, volunteer work, and professional commitments. It is designed to include people who volunteered in Ukraine with the Peace Corps as well as those who did not. The final thesis paper will be available in CEU's thesis repository after Summer 2025.

What Participating Entails:
If you agree to participate in this study, then you will complete an approximately ~75- minute interview via Zoom, to be scheduled at your convenience between March 4 - April 5, 2025. Participation is voluntary. You have the right to decline to answer any questions or to end the interview early. If you would like to withdraw from the study entirely, this needs to be communicated before you end the interview.

The interview will be recorded for the purpose of ensuring transcription accuracy. The recordings will be viewed only by the researcher. The researcher will analyze the transcribed content of interviews to identify important themes. Content will be presented in the final thesis paper primarily as summaries. Some direct quotes may be used to illustrate key points. No quotes will be attributed to individual interviewees.

Your information will be kept confidential. Although some background information about interviewees will be included in the final paper (for example, number of interviewees by gender, project sector if applicable, years spent in Ukraine, etc.), no published information will be tied to your individual name or identity. Additionally, care will be taken to avoid mentioning individuals, organizations, or places in Ukraine that may be put at risk if identified as collaborating with Americans or resisting Russian occupation.

Given the reality of war in Ukraine and related geopolitical contention, participants may find some portions of the interview to be emotionally intense. However, the interview will not focus solely on the war, and it is permissible to take short breaks or change topics. On interview day, it is advised that you allow time to decompress before moving from your interview to other commitments.

Please fill out the questionnaire below in order to participate. If you have additional questions, you may email Cortney at copeland_cortney@student.ceu.edu.

Check all that apply.
☐ I have been informed about the goals and topic of the research
☐ I understand that the interview will be recorded. Recordings will be viewed only by the researcher.
☐ Short quotes or summaries of what I say may be included in the research paper, but will not be connected to my identity.
☐ I am aware that my participation is voluntary. I can decline questions, end the interview early, or withdraw my participation by informing the researcher before ending the interview.

17. Given the above conditions, my decision about participation is indicated below: *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ I agree to participate in an interview with the given conditions
- ◯ I have a few more questions for the researcher before agreeing to participate
- ◯ I do not wish to participate in an interview

18. What is your current age? (optional)

19. How would you describe your race and/or ethnicity? (optional)

20. How would you describe your gender? (optional)

21. Anything else you would like to share with the interviewer before meeting?

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Interview Guide - Revised Feb. 2025

For RPCVs in USA

Question cluster 1a: Service in Ukraine. Key concepts: decision to serve, affective moments + relational context in country

- Why did you join the Peace Corps?
- Did you have the ability to choose country/region?
    - If so - did you choose Ukraine?
    - If not, did you have any particular hopes or interests about where you would go?
    - How did you feel when you found out where you'd be going?
- What did you learn about Ukraine ahead of your departure? From what sources?
- When did you arrive in Ukraine?
    - How long were you there?
    - What was it like there at the time? What were your first impressions?
    - Do you remember what people were talking about, or what was in the news?
- Tell me about the community you lived in.
    - Who did you spend most of your time with? And where?
    - What was important to the people around you? What were they working on?
    - What did you learn from them?
- What kinds of events or places did you visit while in Ukraine?
- What is something that has really stuck with you from your time in Ukraine?
    - Any particularly vivid memories?
    - Changes to how you do or view certain things?

Question cluster 1b: Return to US. Key concepts: transnational social sphere, simultaneity

- How did you feel about finishing service and returning to the US?
- Do you think you changed in any way?
    - If so, what caused that?
- What did you do after finishing service?
    - How was that?
    - What influenced your decisions?
- What helped you readjust to living in the US again?
- Was Ukraine at all present or relevant to your life in the US?
    - Did you still communicate with people in Ukraine?
    - Did you follow Ukrainian events?
    - Did you meet Ukrainian people in the US?
- Did you go back to Ukraine at all?
- What is your connection with Ukraine like today?

Question cluster 2a: Invasion. Key concepts: trauma, community

- (if relevant and not covered previously) - was your community of service impacted by the war and/or annexation in 2014?
- Has your community of service been impacted by the full-scale invasion since 2022?
    - In what ways?

- What do you remember about the start of the invasion?
- Who were you communicating with?
    - Who reached out first?
    - Did you connect with any new people?
    - Did you re-connect with anybody from the past?
    - What were you talking about?
- Do you remember how you felt during that time?

Question cluster 2b: Volunteering, group activities. Key concepts: collective action, meaning

- What actions have you taken in response to the war in Ukraine?
    - How did those start?
    - Who else is involved?
    - How long did you do, or have you done, these things?
    - What is your involvement today?
- What is most important to you when it comes to addressing the war?
- Do you think having served in Peace Corps affects how you've responded?
- Apart from things related to Ukraine, are you active in any other causes through donating, volunteering, or advocating?
    - If so, which ones? Why?

Question cluster 3: American perspective

- How do you assess the importance of the war in Ukraine from an American perspective?
    - What is at stake for Ukrainians?
    - What is at stake for Americans?
- What are the core issues Americans should understand when it comes to Ukraine?
- How do you think American political leaders should engage with Ukraine?
- Given all of the other conflicts, crises, and other things that merit attention globally - what is the relative importance of the outcome of the war?
- What hopes do you have for Ukraine? For the US?
- How do you view your role in shaping these things?

Close interview

Thank the interviewee and reiterate the importance of their contributions.
Review next steps:

- I'll be going back through this interview, along with interviews from other RPCVs, to look for common themes, compare perspectives, etc. Some brief quotes may be included in the final paper, or content may be summarised. No material will be tied to personally identifiable information about you, although some information, like gender and years served, may be indicated when contextualising quotes or summarized material, or noting trends or common themes. The final paper will be posted in CEU thesis repository sometime in Summer 2025.

For RPCVs in Ukraine

Question cluster 1a: Service in Ukraine. Key concepts: decision to serve, affective moments + relational context in country

- Why did you join the Peace Corps?
- Did you have the ability to choose country/region?
    - If so - did you choose Ukraine?
    - If not, did you have any particular hopes or interests about where you would go?
    - How did you feel when you found out where you'd be going?
- What did you learn about Ukraine ahead of your departure? From what sources?
- When did you arrive in Ukraine?
    - How long were you there?
    - What was it like there at the time?
    - Do you remember what people were talking about, or what was in the news?
- Tell me about the community you lived in.
    - What were you doing?
    - Who did you spend most of your time with?
    - What was important to the people around you? What were they working on?
    - What did you learn from them?
- What kinds of events or places did you visit while in Ukraine?
- What is something that has really stuck with you from your time in Ukraine?
    - Any particularly vivid memories?
    - Changes to how you do or view certain things?

Question cluster 1b: Return to US followed by moving again to Ukraine. Key concepts: transnational social sphere, social identity change

- How did you feel about finishing service and returning to the US?
- Do you think you changed in any way?
    - If so, what caused that?
- What did you do after finishing service?
    - How was that?
    - What influenced your decisions?
- When did you decide to move back to Ukraine?
- How would you describe your work and life now?
    - With whom do you spend most of your time?
    - What is important to you on a day to day basis?
- What are your goals and plans for the future?

Question cluster 2a: Invasion. Key concepts: trauma, community

- (if relevant and not covered previously) - was your community of service impacted by the war and/or annexation in 2014?
- Has your community of service been impacted by the full-scale invasion since 2022?
    - In what ways?
- What do you remember about the start of the invasion?
- Who were you communicating with?
    - Who reached out first?

        - Did you connect with any new people?
        - Did you re-connect with anybody from the past?
        - What were you talking about?
    - Do you remember how you felt during that time?

Question cluster 2b: Volunteering, group activities. Key concepts: collective action, meaning

- What actions have you taken in response to the war in Ukraine?
    - How did those start?
    - Who else is involved?
    - How long did you do, or have you done, these things?
    - What is your involvement today?
- What is most important to you when it comes to addressing the war?
- Do you think having served in Peace Corps affects how you've responded?
- Apart from things related to Ukraine, are you active in any other causes through donating, volunteering, or advocating?
    - If so, which ones? Why?

Question cluster 3: American perspective

- How do you assess the importance of the war in Ukraine from an American perspective?
    - What is at stake for Ukrainians?
    - What is at stake for Americans?
- What are the core issues Americans should understand when it comes to Ukraine?
- How do you think American political leaders should engage with Ukraine?
- Given all of the other conflicts, crises, and other things that merit attention globally - what is the relative importance of the outcome of the war?
- What hopes do you have for Ukraine? For the US?
- How do you view your role in shaping these things?

Close interview

Thank the interviewee and reiterate the importance of their contributions.
Review next steps:

- I'll be going back through this interview, along with interviews from other RPCVs, to look for common themes, compare perspectives, etc. Some brief quotes may be included in the final paper, or content may be summarised. No material will be tied to personally identifiable information about you, although some information, like gender and years served, may be indicated when contextualising quotes or summarized material, or noting trends or common themes. The final paper will be posted in CEU thesis repository sometime in Summer 2025.

For Non-RPCVs in USA

Question cluster 1: Awareness, initial involvement. Key concepts: long-distance trauma, proximity, transnational relational context, cosmopolitanism

- What's the story of how you came to volunteer for Ukrainian causes?
- Would you say you are generally active in following or responding to world events?
- Have you been to Ukraine?
- Did you know much about Ukraine before it was in the news?
    - Where did/do you get information about Ukraine?
- How would you describe your personal connection to Ukraine or its people?

Question cluster 2: Volunteering, group activities. Key concepts: collective action, meaning

- What actions have you taken in response to the war in Ukraine?
    - How did those start?
    - Who else is involved?
    - How long did you do, or have you done, these things?
    - What is your involvement today?
- What is most important to you when it comes to addressing the war?
- Apart from things related to Ukraine, are you active in any other causes through donating, volunteering, or advocating?
    - If so, which ones? Why?

Question cluster 3: American perspective

- How do you assess the importance of the war in Ukraine from an American perspective?
    - What is at stake for Ukrainians?
    - What is at stake for Americans?
- What are the core issues Americans should understand when it comes to Ukraine?
- How do you think American political leaders should engage with Ukraine?
- Given all of the other conflicts, crises, and other things that merit attention globally - what is the relative importance of the outcome of the war?
- What hopes do you have for Ukraine? For the US?
- How do you view your role in shaping these things?

Close interview

Thank the interviewee and reiterate the importance of their contributions. Let them know you have gotten through all the questions. Ask - is there anything else they would like to add?

Review next steps:

- I'll be going back through this interview, along with interviews from other RPCVs, to look for common themes, compare perspectives, etc. Some brief quotes may be included in the final paper, or content may be summarised. No material will be tied to personally identifiable information about you, although some information, like gender and years served, may be indicated when contextualising quotes or summarized material, or noting trends or common themes. The final paper will be posted in CEU thesis repository sometime in Summer 2025.

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