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When neighborhood goes to war.

**Exploring the effect of belonging on violent mobilization in
Ukraine**

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Abstract: *Why do some geographical locales experience higher levels of violent mobilization during armed conflicts than others? Existing studies on high-risk mobilization examined economic greed and ethno-nationalist grievances, as well as incentives- and sanctions-based motivations to fight in civil wars. In order to explain violent mobilization beyond the extant theories of participation in civil wars, this article borrows from ethnography, psychology and anthropology the previously unexplored in security studies concept of “belonging” to a locality. Drawing its empirical insights from unique interview data on mass wartime mobilization, which occurred between March and September 2014 in Ukraine, this study argues that belonging to a particular locale serves as a robust cause of violent mobilization. Using a rare sample of former and active members of pro-government paramilitary battalions from one carefully selected locality in Kyiv, reveals that individuals engaged in high-risk mobilization in the East Ukraine’s conflict were influenced by the sense of belonging more than by political or ethnic grievances.*

Keywords: Civil war, armed groups, mobilization, belonging.

Introduction

On November 27th 1095, Pope Urban's sermon at Clermont mobilized up to 100,000 men across Europe to embark on the First Crusade. Yet, as noted by Asbridge (2004, 40), "[T]his was, of course, not a full mobilisation of all Latin manpower. ... more people stayed at home than took the cross." Scholars have long quizzed what – apart from religious fervor and material greed – accounted for higher mobilization for the Crusades in some parts of Europe, but not in others (Blaydes and Paik 2016). Similar questions have been raised by researchers of contemporary armed conflicts, who have sought to explain why some regions, towns, or villages produce more combatants than others. How can we explain the existence of high mobilization areas, or "mobilization hubs"?

The bulk of explanations in scholarship on violent mobilizationⁱ in the context of armed conflicts has focused on political grievances (Horowitz 1985), material greed (Collier and Hoeffler 2004), social sanctions and collective incentives (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008), moral and emotional considerations (Wood 2008; Petersen 2001), sociocultural incentives (Souleimanov and Aliyev 2015), territorial control (Kalyvas and Arjona 2008), friendship (McAdam 1986), social networks (Gould 1993; Viterba 2006; Parkinson 2013), rational decision-making (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007), organizational structures (Weinstein 2006), and group identity (Gurr 2015).

However, individual choices to participate or not to participate in violence are not always limited to motivations and various exogenous factors. The locale where mobilization occurs, or fails to occur, may provide as many clues to the phenomenon as other factors in the extant literature on mobilization. The relationship between *belonging* to a geographical locale and individual choices and decisions that has long been explored in depth in human geography, anthropology, ethnography, sociology, psychoanalysis and social psychology,

ⁱⁱ remains largely disregarded by studies on mobilization in civil wars. If individuals remain embedded for significant periods of their life in a locale, belonging can offer explanations not only about patterns of human behavior and thinking, but also about their choices and motivations to (not to) engage in high-risk mobilization. Why do some geographical areas exhibit higher level of mobilization than others? How does belonging affect individual-level decisions to participate in high-risk mobilization? These critical questions are left unanswered in the literature on violent mobilization.

Using micro-level data on pro-government mobilization during the early months of armed conflict in East Ukraine, this study argues that belonging to a geographical (or geo-) locale is one of the factors affecting individual choices of participating in violence. Belonging to, or embeddedness into, a particular narrowly-defined socio-cognitive context shapes actors' perception of events and impacts their decisions. Notwithstanding the importance of nation-wide perceptions, popular perceptions conceived at a neighborhood, village or district level may prevail and predetermine individuals' mobilization choices. Once "localized" popular perceptions have facilitated conditions favorable for mobilization, individual decisions to mobilize emerge as morally-appropriate obligations. This process is likely, although not necessarily, to occur in geo-locales with previous history of violent mobilization, or high-risk protest activity.

Massive pro-government mobilization that took place during the first several months of armed conflict in East Ukraine – initially dubbed as the rise of national-patriotism – presents a challenging puzzle for scholars of mobilization. The link between Ukrainian nationalism or ethnic self-consciousness and wartime participation has been shattered by the fact that the highest level of pro-government mobilization occurred in eastern, southern and central Russian-speaking and bilingual areas of the country, rather than in the Ukrainian-speaking West (Aliyev 2019). With neither ethnic nor political grievances offering a convincing

explanation as to why thousands of Russian-speakers and ethnic Russians across eastern, southern and central regions of the country have taken enormous risks to fight against fellow Russian-speakers in Donbas, this article demonstrates that individuals' belonging to a locality may offer clues to previously overlooked in conflict and security studies literature aspects of wartime mobilization. Empirically centered on an understudied case of Ukrainian mobilization in Spring-Summer 2014, this study advances the theory of belonging as a cause of violent mobilization in civil wars.

The pro-government mobilization in Ukraine

The annexation of Crimea by Russia on March 16th 2014 was followed by a decree on nationwide mobilization and the creation of Territorial Defence Battalions (*Bataliony Territorialnoi Oborony*) released by the acting President Oleksandr Turchinov. The “citizen volunteer” battalions were assembled by the Ministry of Defence in order to create units able to assist the National Army and National Guard to maintain the law and order. However, only about 4,000 volunteers joined the Ukrainian army and volunteer battalions by the end of March. Large scale mobilization into the volunteer battalions began only following the anti-government protests in Donetsk and Luhansk, resulting in the occupation of government buildings by pro-secessionist protesters in the early April. The start of anti-terrorist operation (ATO) in Donbas was declared by the Ukrainian authorities on April 13th.

The first weeks of ATO were marred by the collapse of the Ukrainian army and the loss of control over Donetsk, Sloviansk, Kramatorsk and a few other towns and cities across Donbas. The Ukrainian units demonstrated the lack of combat readiness, with a number of government platoons voluntarily surrendering their weapons and vehicles to separatists, and on some occasions even switching sides (KyivPost 2014). The 130,000 strong Ukrainian

army had less than 6,000 combat ready troops, most of which were in the National Guard. By the mid-April, the separatists took control over the large part of the Donbas region. Soon after declaring the creation of Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR), the separatist armies launched offensive toward the Black Sea coastal city of Mariupol.

Due to widespread corruption, embezzlement and hazing, the Ukrainian armed forces were popularly perceived as dysfunctional and incapable (Freedman 2014; Aliyev 2016b). The emergence of the battalions was the direct response to the inability of the army to halt the separatist advances. By the time when the second wave of mass mobilization was declared on May 6th, thousands of volunteers started joining the battalions. With the numbers of volunteer combatants reaching 20,000 to 30,000 men and women, there were over 40 battalions operating in the ATO area (Aliyev 2016a, 507).

The paramilitary battalions – in particular “Azov,” “Right Sector,” “Donbas” and “Aydar” – were at the forefront of government offensives in June and July. Reinforced by large numbers of volunteers, pro-government forces managed to successfully dislodge separatists from their strongholds in Sloviansk and Kramatorsk. By the second week of July, government troops recaptured a number of towns and villages around Donetsk and were advancing on the DNR's capital. When the third wave of mobilization was announced on July 22nd, pro-government units defeated separatists in Horlivka and reoccupied large parts of the rebel-controlled Donbas region. However, the government offensive was doomed when separatists received direct military support from Russia.ⁱⁱⁱ By the end of August, separatists succeeded in recapturing most of their lost territory and pushed toward the Black Sea port of Mariupol. The Minsk Protocol ceasefire agreement signed on September 5th provided the government with much needed respite. The fighting resumed in January 2015, and resulted in further territorial losses for the Ukrainian government. It is only after the

second ceasefire, signed on February 11th as part of Minsk 2.0 peace talks, that the large scale combat ceased on the frontlines.

It is noteworthy that most of pro-government mobilization occurred not in the Ukrainian-speaking western regions of the country, but in predominantly Russian-speaking east, south and the bilingual centre of Ukraine. One of the first volunteer battalions “Donbas,” which was also the largest in 2014, consisted primarily of Russian-speakers from Donbas and Dnipro regions. Large numbers of Russian-speakers had also joined the powerful far-right “Azov” and “Right Sector” battalions (Schwetz 2014; Abramovich 2014; Aliyev 2018).^{iv} In the words of a former “Azov” recruiter: “Many of our platoons in the ATO in 2014 consisted primarily of Russian speakers. West [regions] provided considerably less people” (Anton, Kyiv, May 2016). The other influential battalion – also notorious for its Ukrainian nationalist and far-right rhetoric – the “Right Sector” was overwhelmingly staffed by Russian-speakers from the east and south of Ukraine (Tsibenko 2014). A former “Right Sector” (DUK-Volunteer Corps of Ukraine) recruit attested that he was surprised to discover that most other recruits in his new regiment: “were speaking mostly Russian and were from Kyiv, Odesa and some other [Russian-speaking] cities” (Gavriil, Kyiv, July 2016).

The paradox of Ukrainian pro-government mobilization in the Spring-Summer’14 does not easily conform to the logic of ethnic defection, which is “is a process whereby individuals join organizations explicitly opposed to the national aspirations of the ethnic group with which they identify and end up fighting against their coethnics” (Kalyvas 2008, 1045). On the one hand, the vast majority of Russian-speakers in contemporary Ukraine – including all interview participants – tend to identify themselves as Russian-speaking Ukrainians rather than ethnic Russians. On the other hand, the key precondition of ethnic defection – “the acquisition by individuals of a new ethnic (or national) identity that replaces the old one” (Kalyvas 2008, 1045) – has never occurred among Russian-speaking or bilingual Ukrainians.

Notwithstanding the overarching ethno-nationalist rhetoric employed by both sides of the dyad from the conflict onset, *en mass* mobilization of mixed ethnicity, bilingual or Russian-speaking combatants on the government side, and large numbers of mixed ethnicity bilingual Ukrainians and Russians on the rebel side, attests to the fact that ethno-nationalism was one of the least probable causes of wartime mobilization in the Spring-Summer 2014. Not only ethno-nationalist grievances, but also – as it will be discussed in further parts of the article – political ideology and economic greed, were unlikely causes of Ukraine’s violent mobilization.

Belonging and high-risk mobilization

Although efforts to examine the belonging to a locality as a cause of wartime mobilization were rare in civil war literature, existing scholarship emphasizes the role of shared ethnic, religious or regional identities and cultural cleavages in motivating the creation of, and a sense of belonging to “negative protest coalitions” (Beissinger 2013). In a similar vein, research in political geography considered how geographic and social locations, such as neighborhoods, influence voting behavior in the post-Soviet region regardless of socio-economic status and education (O’Loughlin et al. 1997). All of these studies hint toward the significance of locality as a violent mobilization factor.

The concept of “place” plays a prominent role in research on human geography. Advanced by Cresswell (2014), the role of *place* was described as crucial in identity formation (Paasi 2003), patterns of human behavior (MacKay 1956), and human mobility (Bergmann and Sager 2008; Cresswell and Merriman 2011). Similarly, classical and social psychology (Lewin 1948; Greider et al. 1991), anthropology (Lovell 1998; Ball-Rokeach et

al. 2001), ethnography (Mason 2000; Peter 2008), cultural studies (Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Keith and Pile 1993) and sociology (Croucher 2004; Castells 2010) provide a diverse body of literature discussing various aspects of belonging. Despite its relationship with identity, community and ethnic or political self-consciousness, belonging has thus far only found limited acknowledgement in research on politics (Crowley 1999; Yuval-Davis 2006). In human geography, the relationship between place or belonging to a place and violent mobilization has largely been studied from the perspective of activism and protest (Martin 2003; Gilster 2014), leaving the dimension of armed violence relatively underexplored.

Although definitions of belonging are plentiful, most concepts tend to converge on presenting belonging as a complex set of perceptions associated with a locale, or social community, or as an amalgam of both. As detailed by Lovell (1998, 1), “belonging is also fundamentally defined through a sense of experience, a phenomenology of locality which serves to create, mold and reflect perceived ideals surrounding place.” For Yuval-Davis (2006, 199), “belonging can be an act of self-identification or identification by others, in a stable, contested or transient way. Even in its most stable ‘primordial’ forms, however, belonging is always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity.” For the purpose of this study, I define *belonging as a form of identification with locality that affects both individual and group-level perceptions of events within and beyond their locality and influences the individual choices and behaviors*. Belonging is limited to either physical or imaginary (narrowly-defined) boundaries of a locality.^v These boundaries may or may not coincide with borders of a city, district, region, ethnic group or a community. Similarly to the perception of locality by citizens of ancient Greek *polis* (city-states), belonging is not strictly delineated by ethnic, linguistic, cultural, political or religious boundaries.^{vi} Rather, as explained by Lovell (1998, 1), “[L]ocality and belonging may be moulded and defined as much by actual

territorial emplacement as by memories of belonging to particular landscapes whose physical reality is enacted only through acts of collective remembering.”

Although the phenomenon of “mobilization hubs” – areas with higher level of violent mobilization than the rest of the country – is as ancient as the history of human warfare, it is not peculiar to ancient history. Examples from contemporary armed conflicts are plentiful. Notwithstanding the dominant paradigm in research on ongoing civil war in Afghanistan, which posits that the highest levels of pro-Taliban mobilization occur in ethnic Pashtun areas in the southern Afghanistan (Johnson and Mason 2008; Nojumi 2016), evidence suggests that the patterns of Taliban mobilization differ not only from one district to another, but also between villages and townships.^{vii} Both in the Pashtun south of Afghanistan and in the tribal belt of Pakistan’s North-Western Frontier province, violent mobilization does not occur alongside tribal and clan cleavages, but regardless of them (Haring 2010). Similar patterns were detailed by Gagnon (2006) in the 1990s Serbia. In his efforts to debunk the “myth of ethnic war” during the Yugoslav Wars, Gagnon (2006, 2) observed that the start of official mobilization in 1991 Serbia has led “to one of the most massive campaigns of draft resistance in modern history”. Rather than experiencing mass ethnic mobilization, which was often reported by the Western journalists and policy-makers, Serbia’s patchy and fragmented mobilization was limited to certain rural areas, which provided the bulk of reservists for the Serb military and paramilitary forces.

Regardless of the assumed causes of violent mobilization, all episodes of high-risk activism in human history share one simple characteristic in common: *locality where the mobilization occurs*. Yet, the efforts to link locality to mobilization have often led researchers back to theories of greed, grievances and selective incentives or sanctions. Scholars have sought to provide various locality-based explanations for the existence of “mobilization hubs”. From the highlands of Scotland to mountainous Albania, Montenegro and Chechnya,

higher levels of violent mobilization among “mountaineers” were explained by sociocultural norms, traditions and social sanctions. Urban mobilization in places as diverse as El Salvador (Wood 2008), India (Chandra 2001), and Pakistan (Staniland 2010) has been explained by social mobilization, economic growth and higher living standards. Mobilization in rural areas instead was associated with poverty, socio-political identities, social networks and access to resources (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Chauveaux and Richards 2008).

Notwithstanding the diversity of research on high-risk activism, attempts to examine the *belonging* to a locality as a cause of violent mobilization – as opposed to belonging to an ethnic group, or physical communities and networks – are notable by their absence not only in wartime mobilization literature, but also in broader conflict and security studies. Efforts to link space to participation in conflict emerge in Krause’s (2019) study on the intersection of social networks and neighborhood identity, as well as in works by Lewis (2017; Larson and Lewis 2018) on ethno-linguistic networks and mobilization in Northern Uganda. Dorff’s (2019) work on social networks, family, and mobilization had also sought to associate social networks with spatial conflict.

The main theoretical argument of this study is that belonging to a locality can function as a robust cause of high-risk mobilization, which can explain why some geo-locales experience higher level of mobilization than others. Belonging facilitates the emergence of mobilization *perceptions* peculiar to a locality, which then form individually constructed *obligations* to participate in action. Provided that the perceptions are favorable toward high-risk activism, more individuals are likely to mobilize for action. Bearing in mind that the perceptions are, first of all, formed upon local narratives, some geo-locales may experience higher level of mobilization than others. Local narratives and the locality-centered perceptions have long been acknowledged behind the construction of public opinion (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1966; Gamson 1992), collective action (Olson 2009) and collective identity (Anderson 1991). In

urban contexts, the process of perception construction was conceptualized by Ball-Rokeach et al. (2001, 394) as “storytelling neighborhood” which is “a process embedded in daily practices that ideally moves from communication of any form, to communication of a general storytelling or narrative form.” Individuals do not necessarily need to have a communal identity (Viterna 2006), and to even identify themselves with a particular community, or a group of people in order to be influenced by the belonging to locality. It is the microcosm of geo-locale rather than a community that encourages perception formation and alters the individuals’ attitudes and opinions. Much in contrast to social identity, belonging is defined by connection to a locality as a physical space rather than to a group of people, and, therefore, perceptions borne out of belonging are defined by place rather than by people. This makes belonging fundamentally different from social sanctions, which in order to function, as detailed by Humphreys and Weinstein (2008, 442), require the existence of a strong community, capable to sanction its members for not complying with its norms. While few scholars focus on storytelling when it comes to mobilization in rebellion, broader literature on rebel ideology addresses modes of transmission, such as storytelling. The role of stories and narratives has been discussed by Aspinall (2007) in his research on conflict causes in Aceh, as well as by Eck (2007), Green (2007) and Parkinson (2013).

After positive (or negative) perceptions toward mobilization are formed, individuals may choose to either take action or to refrain from it. In a locality with positive toward mobilization perceptions, more individuals are likely to feel obliged to mobilize. This fosters the emergence of “mobilization hubs.” Yet, even in a pro-mobilization locality, mobilization perceptions affect different individuals differently, which explains why total mobilization is a rare occurrence. An obligation to take action may also develop differently under different circumstances. Unlike identity-based mobilization theories (McAdam 2000), which posit, as observed by Viterna (2006, 5), that “being a participant must become so important to a

person's sense of self that to not participate would cause psychological and emotional harm," belonging provides self-perceived obligation that may or may not transform into action.

There might be multiple circumstances-driven incentives, which encourage action. Greed and grievances, social sanctions, and networks^{viii} offer only partial explanation as to what may trigger the transformation of mobilization perceptions into obligation-induced action.

Provided that these "triggers" are present across multiple localities – for instance ethnic mobilization is expected to occur across the entire area populated by an ethnic group – it is still hard to explain why only some localities turn into "mobilization hubs."

This study theorizes that it is pre-existing experience, or memory of high-risk activism that is likely to sparkle action in pro-mobilization enclaves. Locality-specific narratives do not emerge in a vacuum. Since construction of perceptions and their reshaping into obligations may differ from one locality to another, owing to the spread of information that enables the construction of mobilization narratives, previous history of high-risk activism facilitates the dissemination of narratives. Studies have demonstrated that previous history of protest activism or violent mobilization is sometimes engendered in pre-existing network structures (Parkinson 2013; Gould 1993; McAdam 1986), and sometimes in more distant collective memory of wartime mobilization (Pennebaker et al. 2013), or even in custom- and tradition-encoded obligation to mobilize (Souleimanov and Aliyev 2015). With the above in mind, it is reasonable to assume that the warrior image of Scottish highlanders, Cossacks, or the tribes of Nagaland – all of whom, and many others, are examples of a locality-restricted mobilization – are cases of high-risk mobilization as a result of perceptions and obligations evolved and reinforced upon pre-existing memories of violent action.

The overarching theoretical claim of this study is that belonging influences high-risk mobilization in a two-stage process through (1) construction of perceptions and (2) the emergence of perception-induced obligation to act. Both of which develop upon mobilization

narratives that are heavily influenced by pre-existing history of high-risk activism. Hence, as a primordial cause of high-risk mobilization, belonging to a locality affects mobilization beyond and despite ethno-nationalism, sectarianism, political grievances, material greed and socio-cultural organization and structure.

Research design

Owing to the challenges of access, the bulk of studies on civil war mobilization relies on ethnographic-historical approaches and small carefully selected data samples (Parkinson 2013). This study follows a similar ethnographic design that employs semi-structured interviews, participatory observation and “meta-data” collection (Fujii 2010). Identifying causes of violent mobilization among a narrowly defined group of individuals requires context-based and nuanced micro-level analysis that can only be obtained through ethnographic fieldwork-intensive methods of enquiry (Parkinson 2013, 420). The lack of recorded data, challenges of accessing informants and the imminent security concerns are among the key factors restricting open-ended surveys when working with members of active armed groups. By contrast, ethnographic methods are particularly well suited to analyze individual cases of high-risk mobilization.

A number of informal conversations with representatives of volunteer battalions, the Ukrainian journalists and members of volunteer recruitment centers conducted by the author in the early 2015 provided solid albeit unsystematic initial evidence that during the Spring-Summer 2014, Kyiv functioned as one of the key mobilization centers for the war effort in the East. On a number of occasions, the battalion representatives hinted that the Russian-speaking East of Ukraine and Kyiv, were the key sources of combatant mobilization into their

battalions during the early stages of conflict (Stepan 1, Kyiv, July 2017). Given that historically large portion of Kyiv's population are Russian-speakers (Arel 1996; Pavlenko 2010, 133), the research puzzle on Ukraine's wartime mobilization began to emerge. A pilot project conducted between June and August 2015 in Kyiv surveyed data from five (5) volunteer recruitment centers based in Kyiv. The analysis of recruitment data and numerous informal conversations with employees of the recruitment centers indicated that a predominant majority of volunteers^{ix} with Kyiv residence (*propiska*) originated from the Left Bank of Kyiv.

This study is based on 16 months of fieldwork conducted in Kyiv between August 2015 and October 2017. I interviewed 78 demobilized (n=43) and active (n=35)^x paramilitary fighters from Kyiv. Informants were selected as based on their membership for at least 30 consecutive days in a pro-government volunteer battalion, and their permanent or long-term residence in Kyiv. To ensure sample randomness, contacts were collected from eight (8) volunteer centers based in five different districts of Kyiv. Additional contacts were also obtained from the All-Ukrainian Union of ATO veterans, Ministry of Interior, National Guard, and representatives of independent mass media. Of 78 interviewees, 52 (66%) informants identified the Left Bank of Kyiv as their permanent place of residence. The Left Bank of Kyiv is a sprawling residential neighborhood located on the left side of river Dnieper, which divides Kyiv into two parts (see Figure 1).^{xi} In contrast to historical and administrative Right Bank, the Left Bank is a residential area, which houses approximately 30 percent of Kyiv's population. With regards to gender balance among informants, the sample consists of 85% (n=66) males and 15% (n=12) females. All interviewees were aged between 19 and 35 years old, with average age of 25. The majority had white collar pre-war occupations (67%) and many had either university (56%), or professional education (27%).

Figure 1.> Map of Kyiv (Left Bank is highlighted).

Source: <http://www.kiev-maps.com/map-6/>.

Interviews cover a seven-month period from March to September 2014. The timeframe was selected due to the peak of pro-government mobilization, which occurred during the initial stages of armed conflict in East Ukraine. The sample consists of individuals who volunteered to join pro-government armed units from the 1st wave of mobilization on March 17th until the signing of the Minsk Protocol on September 5th 2014. The decree “On defense of Ukraine” issued on March 17th, 2014, serves as the starting point of mass paramilitary mobilization (1st wave). Although interview data covers the events immediately preceding the mid-March, March 17th was taken as a point of departure in conversations with informants. Of 78 conflict participants, 33.5% (n=43) mobilized during the 1st wave (March 17-May 6), 16% (n=21) during the 2nd wave (May 6-July 22) and 11% (n=14) during the 3rd wave (July 22-September 5).

Interviews followed semi-structured format and were based on a list of topics.^{xii} *First*, interviewees were requested to provide basic information about themselves (age, profession,

education, ethnicity), and to describe their occupation, political views and political activity prior to mobilization. *Second*, informants were asked to elaborate on their experience of joining the battalions. Stories of individual motivation, interaction with other individuals (friends, family, colleagues etc.), perception of the situation and personal attitudes toward the conflict were collected. An emphasis was made on the analysis of “meta-data,”^{xiii} enabling the interviewer to capture interlocutor’s anxiety, discomfort and other emotions during conversations. Because of ethical considerations of working with human subjects, all interviews were conducted on the condition of full anonymity.^{xiv} Due to security concerns, no recording device could be used during interviews. Since many interviewees expressed unwillingness to speak freely during recorded interviews, only detailed handwritten notes were taken during conversations with informants. It is not uncommon for researchers working on sensitive conflict-related issues to never record their interviews (Parkinson, 2013; Jamal 2009). Narrative analysis was employed to code the data.

The author’s own background from a former Soviet country (not Ukraine) and the ability to communicate in fluent Russian, influenced trust issues and mitigated potential biases in interpreting and guiding interviews. A former member of a volunteer battalions was employed as a research associate to facilitate access to interviewees and to control for truthfulness of the responses. The research associate was present during approximately 60% of interviews to assist with notetaking.

Although the bulk of interview data consists of semi-structured interviews with former and active combatants, a significant amount of primary data also derives from participant observation with non-combatants (friends, families and acquaintances of paramilitary members) and the witnesses of mobilization carried out in informal settings. These informal interactions were recorded as field notes. When interviewing the non-participants, the selection did not focus on the dependent variable, but had rather tried to choose a research

approach which traces the mechanisms that underscore the “whys” and “hows” of mobilization.

Twelve additional interviews were carried out with former and current employees of the volunteer assistance groups and organizations and volunteer recruitment centers based in Kyiv. In order to triangulate the interview data, I also interviewed members of the Ukrainian civil society groups working with veterans of ATO (n=8), experts (n=4), practitioners (n=3), policy-makers (n=2) and state officials working in relevant ministries (n=5).

Belonging and wartime mobilization in Kyiv

Why did large numbers of the Ukrainian civilians – particularly among the Ukrainian Russian-speakers – mobilize for government at the beginning of East Ukraine conflict? Although the most radical of the battalions, “Right Sector” and “Azov” were known to recruit far-right football hooligans and neo-Nazi youth into their ranks (Bogdana, Kyiv, June 2017), numerous volunteers flocking the recruitment centers in Kyiv had limited understanding of or interest in the far-right ideology. Several paramilitary volunteers from Kyiv reported that nationalism was the least likely cause of their mobilization in the Spring-Summer’14. A former volunteer noted: “I didn’t really care about [battalion’s] ideology. They were great guys and most were Russian-speakers like myself” (Alexander 1, Kyiv, September 2015). A former member of the “Right Sector” commented: “We never talked about political ideology ... we never had time. It [service] was all about survival” (Denis, Kyiv, July 2016). Apart from the combatants’ testimonies, the far-right leaning of the battalions is challenged by the fact that both “Right Sector” and “Azov” – as the most far-right battalions – not only actively recruited fighters from among the Ukrainian ethnic minorities (Jews, Greeks, Russians,

Tartars, Armenians, etc.), but also organized ethnic minority platoons, such as for instance, (Muslim) Crimean Tartar platoon (*sotn'ya*) in the “Right Sector”. An “Azov” fighter of ethnic Jewish origin explained: “Essentially, we were all Ukrainians there [at the battalion] ... your ethnicity did not matter. I have a Jewish star [Star of David] with me all the time, because I’m Jewish Ukrainian. That was never an issue” (Roman1, Kyiv, September 2016).^{xv} A former “Crimean Tartar Right Sector” volunteer added: “We were fighting against Putin’s army and [their] Donetsk and Luhansk cronies. If I’m branded as the Ukrainian Nazi because of that, so be it, but I am also a Muslim” (Akhmad, Kyiv, August 2015). If ethno-nationalism was not the key driving force behind the Spring-Summer’14 mobilization, which other factors could have contributed toward the mass pro-government mobilization?

Previous studies emphasized that pre-existing quotidian networks,^{xvi} along with kinship and communal structures, function as essential mobilization mechanisms in conflict-affected societies (McAdam 1986; Wood 2008). The present-day Ukrainian society is characterized by relatively weak family and kinship bonds (Williams et al. 2011; Aliyev 2017). Not only in urban locales, but also in rural areas, the decades of Soviet rule, heavy industrialization and urbanization undermined traditional kinship structures. Scholars described post-Soviet Ukrainians as typical post-communist low-trust individualist society (Williams and Onoshchenko 2015). These trends were also notable in the mobilization patterns. Most members of volunteer battalions recalled mobilizing in groups of two or individually, but no interviewees acknowledged the existence of quotidian networks. In the words of a volunteer recruiter: “Mobilization was spontaneous. Some [recruits] came with a friend, most came alone. In my time [as recruiter], I never seen people joining in groups” (Sweta, Kyiv, June 2015). When asked to comment on such a pattern of enlistment, another recruiter said: “Guys mostly came alone or with a friend because [for most] it was an individual decision ... no one has organized anyone, or convinced to join [battalions]” (Viktor, Kyiv, July 2015). The

absence of mobilization networks also explains the feeling of surprise among many recruits who discovered that: "... there were lots of guys in our unit from the Left Bank of Kyiv and even people from my own neighborhood ... I did not know many of them before" (Ruslan2, Kyiv, June 2016). Another battalion member told: "When I was there [ATO] ... I met five or six guys from my neighborhood. But I have never met them before" (Dima, Kyiv, June 2015). Many fighters from the Left Bank reported that encountered individuals from their neighborhoods whom they did not know before mobilization. Although empirical findings of this field research do not provide evidence on the existence of quotidian networks, social connections both real and "imaginary" seemed crucial. Inter-personal relationships appeared important in many of these stories, whether it is people joining the war together with friends, or meeting across the two Banks and engaging in conversations about the war.

Another strand of mobilization studies proposes that individuals mobilize simply because they find themselves compelled by circumstances, such as "wrong time, wrong place" mobilization (Kilcullen 2011; Viterba 2006, 24), or due to benefits which the membership in armed groups entails (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008). While many civilians caught up in fighting in Donbas region during the early Spring of 2014, could have realistically considered joining either side of the dyad in order to find "protection from violence" (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008, 441), the situation was very different for central and southern regions of Ukraine, which are over 700 kilometers away from the frontline. Among all other Ukrainian cities, the capital Kyiv was probably the least directly affected by the war.

The ad hoc organization of volunteer battalions and the lack of funding from the state forced combatants to purchase their own weapons, ammunition and equipment individually. One paramilitary volunteer, who joined soon after the ATO was declared in April 2014, recalled: "We were given uniform, but we had to buy our own food ... we had no other weapons, just old broken AK-47s [assault rifles] ... I had to sell my car to be able to buy a

brand new AK rifle with an ammunition set and body armor” (Bogdan, Kyiv, July 2015). Many other volunteers described that the battalions lacked weapons, ammunition, food, clothing and essentials. When asked about financial remuneration for their service, a former combatant remarked: “Last thing anyone had expected is to get paid for our service. We all understood what a ‘volunteer’ means. We did not go there [ATO] for money” (Alex, Kyiv, July 2016).

Although the findings of this study reveal little evidence of greed and grievances, or the networks-driven mobilization, the interview data demonstrates consistent association between mobilization and the individuals’ belonging to a locality. Construction of mobilization perceptions peculiar to a locality, their transformation into obligations to mobilize – all in the context of pre-existing experience of high-risk mobilization – are evident in the accounts of paramilitary combatants who mobilized in Kyiv between March and September 2014.

“Storytelling” perceptions

“It was on April 16th, when they showed on TV captured [government] tanks and soldiers paraded by those Donetsk ‘gangsters’ in Slavyansk. Everyone has talked about it: in shops, at the street market, at my work, at home” (Andrey, Kyiv, July 2015) – a paramilitary recruit recalled prior to joining a volunteer battalion. Local narratives in the “storytelling” neighborhood have been at the core of construction of pro-mobilization perceptions at the Left Bank during March-April’14.

Many paramilitary recruits remember being constantly subjected to conversations about the war. In the words of a former market employee: “I heard from other guys working near me that some guys from a neighborhood joined ‘Azov’”(Anton, Kyiv, May 2016). The informant explained his reasoning further: “I was thinking that it is our civil duty: my father

went to war [in Afghanistan] and my granddad [WWII]" (Maxim, Kyiv, June 2015). The spread of mobilization perceptions at the Left Bank was particularly wide-reaching during the first months of conflict. A recruit who quit his job as a bank clerk to join paramilitaries remembered that: "in my neighborhood ... and where I worked [also at the Left Bank] people were constantly talking about war ... I couldn't stop thinking about it. The war was literally in the air" (Semen, Kyiv, June 2015). A non-participant from the Left Bank who in 2014 worked as a social worker observed that: "In our neighborhood, almost everyone discussed the war and the popular opinion was that ... because [government] is unable to do something, then people must [act]" (Gennady, Kyiv, December 2016). Storytelling narratives in favor of the action (mobilization) began spreading across the Left Bank since the annexation of Crimea and have reached their peak from the mid-March to early May, when the perception that troubles in the East have to be "solved by the people" became firmly embedded in local narratives. This period experienced the highest level of popular mobilization in the locality.

Narratives of the earlier period of mobilization (1st and 2nd waves) were dominated by such themes as "we have to help the Army", "those Donetsk 'criminals' have to be taught a lesson," or "it is up to us to do something about it, after all it is our country." Mobilization narratives began to change during later stages of the conflict. Yesen, who joined paramilitaries during the 3rd wave of mobilization recalls: "people at work, in the neighborhood, at the local market, talked about the need to confront 'Russian invaders'" (Kyiv, December 2016). Another interviewee who joined paramilitary ranks during the last wave of mobilization in August, said: "I thought that we [Ukraine] can defeat those Donetsk warlords ... they were our people, fellow Ukrainians, but when I saw on TV that Russian tanks entered Ukraine, I thought that enough is enough" (Artem, Kyiv, July 2017). Hence, the perceptions of war – from a domestic problem toward an international conflict or even foreign invasion – were shifting in the course of conflict. Since over half of all informants

mobilized during the 1st wave, and about 30% during the 2nd wave, it is evident that most of the perception construction occurred during the early stages of conflict.

Although it is only the river Dnieper that separates the industrial and residential Left Bank from the bustling business and historical Right Bank of Kyiv, the difference in mobilization perceptions appeared enormous. A volunteer combatant from the Right Bank detailed his experience of mobilization (Roman2, Kyiv, December 2016.):

No one in my circle really cared about the war ... it was something distant, something that did not directly concern us. We all had our jobs, nothing really changed in Kyiv. I had no intention of going there [ATO]. It is only after I accidentally met on the street my old university mate [from Left Bank], who was “Aydar” fighter ... we went for a drink, we talked for hours, and after he told me what the war was like ... it is after that I opened my eyes and several days later decided to follow him to the front.

All other volunteer fighters from the Right Bank described joining battalions together with a friend, who either was already a member of paramilitary forces, or who was from the Left Bank. Witnesses from the Right Bank reported that: “When the war started, no one thought it is for real” (Olga and Alisa, Kyiv, July 2015) and “we rarely talked about the war ... in fact, it was sort of a taboo for us, you know, we all Russian-speakers ... we didn’t really support either side” (Katya, Olena and Timofey, Kyiv, June 2015). Although the level of threat perception was fairly similar in both localities,^{xvii} there was a stark contrast between omnipresent “storytelling” narratives, which boosted the creation of mobilization perceptions at the Left Bank, despite their nearly complete absence at the Right Bank.

Call of duty

“I have heard everyone talking about that [the Ukrainian army defeat] and that Donetsk separatists had to be punished ... and that someone has to stand up and do something” (Andrey, Kyiv, June 2015). Based on the above narrative, Andrey told that: “I have been thinking [about it] for three days and then I decided to join a battalion. It was the right thing to do ... I knew that.” A similar pattern of how obligations to mobilize formed upon perceptions could be observed in stories of other Left Bank volunteers. Ruslan (Ruslan1, Kyiv, Summer 2016) explained: “When my old mate came over to me and asked whether I want to join him [to participate in ATO] ... I didn’t think at all. I agreed. I already heard of others from our neighborhood who joined.” Many participants noted that they felt obliged to mobilize after they heard that others from the neighborhood have done the same. In many cases, the interviewees were not personally familiar with “other” recruits. Nevertheless, the rumors of mass mobilization – embedded in storytelling narratives – appeared to have strong effect on individual decision-making processes. Positive perceptions toward mobilization, which had formed during the “storytelling” stage, began to transform into obligations to act.

However, the obligation to mobilize was not socially sanctioned. Most volunteers arrived to their decisions to mobilize individually. A former volunteer clarified that: “joining [battalions] was generally seen as a good, honorable thing to do, but it was a matter of choice. No one would think bad of those who didn’t want to [mobilize].” Another former volunteer summed up his motivations at the moment of joining a battalion as follows: “It was obligation toward myself rather than toward somebody else ... not even toward my country, but myself” (Dmitry, Kyiv, December 2016). Indeed, the majority of combatants preferred describing their choice to mobilize as “highly personal”, “very individual” or “self-obligatory” rather than driven by the sense of patriotism or social obligation.

It is noteworthy that the popular perception toward the official draft remained highly negative throughout the Spring-Summer'14. Notorious for its corrupt practices, neglect and inefficiency, the image of the Ukrainian Armed Forces was further damaged by a number of humiliating defeats that the army suffered during the first two weeks of ATO. All three waves of mobilization were accompanied by the largest in the Ukrainian history draft evasion.^{xviii} A paramilitary volunteer explained his decision to join a volunteer battalion rather than the army: "I would have gone serving [to the army] ... but everyone knew that this would be a waste of time. I'd have to pay bribes to commanders to avoid hazing and I would end up taken prisoner like many [soldiers]" (Stepan 3, Kyiv, June 2015). Several interviewees admitted that if there were no paramilitary battalions – as an alternative to the army – they would have never mobilized to fight the rebels. Therefore, the emergence of battalions in the Spring 2014 played a critical role in transformation of mobilization perceptions into obligations to act.^{xix}

Scholars have often insisted that individuals tend to carefully evaluate risks and benefits in order to "take enormous risks to participate as fighters in civil war" (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008, 436). However, empirical evidence from in-depth interviews with participants and non-participants of civil wars suggests that decisions to mobilize are often taken spontaneously with no complex thinking and risk calculations involved. The case of the Ukrainian mobilization provides numerous examples of how spontaneous decisions to mobilize were taken. For many, decisions were made promptly and with little reasoning. A former volunteer details: "I heard of people joining [the battalions] *en mass*, ... yes, I did not know them personally, but I knew one thing that I had to join too. I did not think much of it" (Swetoslav, Kyiv, July 2016). Another example of spontaneous mobilization is given by a marketing manager: "I simply decided to join. I did not weight out any cons and pros ... there was no time, our guys there [at the frontlines] needed my help. It is as simple as that" (David,

Kyiv, August 2017). With remarkable consistency, informants described that the period of time elapsed between the emergence of mobilization obligations and the actual decision to mobilize was on average 24 hours or shorter. Remarkably, most paramilitary recruits did not perceive their obligation to mobilize as related to personal or group grievances. As stated by a volunteer: “I did not feel any hatred or anger either toward Donetsk guys or to Russians. They are fellow Slavs and my former country-men. It is only because of circumstances we had to take arms against each other” (Alexander 2, Kyiv, July 2017).

Warrior neighborhood

What has encouraged the spread of mobilization narratives and their development into perceptions, which have led toward obligations to mobilize? The clues as to why mass mobilization occurred at the Left Bank of Kyiv, but not in other parts of the city during the Spring-Summer’14 are scarce. The analysis of interview data, however, reveals a persistent pattern of strong pre-existing tradition of high-risk activism in the locality. Prior history of high-risk activism was cited by the extant literature as one of mobilization causes (McAdam 1986; Viterina 2006). Yet, the relationship between belonging-driven mobilization and pre-existing experience of high-risk activism remains understudied.

Over half of informants from both parts of the city reported that they also participated in the Euromaidan protests, which took place between November 2013 and February 2014 and resulted in violent overthrow of President Viktor Yanukovich. About 65 percent of Euromaidan veterans were members of the so-called “Self-Defense of Maidan” units.^{xx} According to Kyrill (Kyiv, June 2016) who served in a “Self-Defense” brigade: “the transition was very natural for me ... I saw this conflict as a direct continuation [of Maidan].” When the mobilization narratives began spreading across the Left Bank neighborhoods,

Kyrill's friend, Anton (Kyiv, May 2016), who was also a former "Self-Defense" volunteer, said: "I already saw on Facebook that some other guys [from the "Self-Defense"] joined 'Azov.' I knew it was our call."

When asked about motivations behind participation in Euromaidan protests, interviewees described very similar mobilization pathways, which evolved through the construction of perceptions and their development into obligations. In the words of Kyrill, there was little difference between mobilizing for ATO and protesting at the Maidan, because as a member of "Self-Defense": "at the Maidan [protests] you could also be killed and you never knew in the morning whether you are going to come back home in the evening safe and in one piece" (Kyrill, Kyiv, May 2016). Despite claims in the media that "Self-Defense" units *en mass* migrated into volunteer battalions as soon as the latter were created,^{xxi} all veterans of "Self-Defense" among interviewees reported that their "Self-Defense" units were dissolved after the end of protests in February, and that they returned to their pre-Maidan lives before mobilizing into paramilitary battalions in Spring-Summer'14. As observed by a former Maidan protester and a paramilitary fighter: "I only spend home about a month before re-joining the fight. It was just one chain of events ... one fight" (Alexander 1, Kyiv, September 2015.). Similar connection between wartime mobilization into the Ukrainian army and previous participation in Maidan protests was found by Mironova and Whitt (2019).

The history of high-risk activism among the Left Bank residents extends well beyond Euromaidan experience: some 40 percent of paramilitary recruits participated in the Orange Revolution protests of 2004-05, which also took place at the Maidan square in city center.^{xxii} A veteran of Orange Revolution and Euromaidan from the Left Bank explained: "Unlike other Ukrainians, for us Kyiv residents [*kievl'ian*] it was always easier to participate in Maidan [protests], because we live here" (Ivan1, Kyiv, August 2017). He added that: "also in contrast to people on the other [Right] bank [of Dnieper river] ... here at the Left Bank, we

were safe from the [events] of Maidan. After protesting during the daytime, we could come back home to safety.” Location of the Left Bank – separated by Dnieper river from the rest of the city, yet still close to city center – may provide some explanations as to why many of its residents took part in the Maidan protests. However, the history of the Left Bank as a “mobilization hub” is older than Maidan events.^{xxiii} Not only the locality had numerous apartment buildings with flats allocated to former military personnel in Soviet Ukraine – and therefore had higher percentage of people with professional military background than the rest of the city – but also the Left Bank and forested areas to its east were the stronghold of a pro-Soviet partisan army during the Nazi occupation of Kyiv in 1941-43.^{xxiv}

Figure 2 > Darnitsky district of Kyiv’s Left Bank, where many paramilitary volunteers were residing prior to mobilizing (Author’s photo).

Previous studies have shown that recurrent civil wars are often path-dependent (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Suhrke and Samset 2007). However, path-dependence fails to provide a convincing explanation for the waves of high-risk mobilization at the Left Bank of Kyiv. With the exception of Maidan protests of 2004-05 and 2013-14, no other previous episode of high-risk mobilization throughout the history of Left Bank is path-dependent, indicating that

it is not the immediate memory of previous mobilization events, but rather the collective perceptions of mass mobilization, or the continuity of mobilization-favorable narratives that influences each successive wave of violent mobilization in the locality. Similar “in-waves” mobilization patterns have been observed by Hopkins (2009) among Pashtun tribes of the North Western Frontier province of Pakistan. Avtorkhanov (1996) detailed how the highlands of south-eastern Chechnya – particularly the rural locality of Vedeno – remained a “mobilization hub” for centuries with each mobilization episode separated from the previous one sometimes by over a generation. In a similar vein, Simic (1967) described another historical “mobilization hub”, the Dinaric highlands of Montenegro, which were a scene for numerous waves of violent mobilization over the course of centuries.

That said, the pre-existing history of high-risk activism offers only partial explanation as to why “mobilization hubs” emerge in some localities, but not in others. Rather it is the process of construction of narrative-influenced perceptions and their effect upon obligations to act, which is based on the belonging to a locality that explains how and why violent mobilization occurs in a certain locality. Since many mobilization episodes occurring in “mobilization hubs” are separated by time periods – some lasting decades – it is the ability of a locality to maintain and preserve the narratives that ensures the continuity of mobilization events. Clearly, not all “mobilization hubs” last for centuries. Modernity, globalization, population shifts may be expected to affect the continuity of mobilization narratives.

Conclusion

The key theoretical argument of this study is that belonging to a locality serves as strong and previously under-researched cause of high-risk mobilization in civil wars. Belonging-based mobilization occurs irrespectively of other mobilization causes – although it may synthesize

some other factors – and is more likely to occur in areas with pre-existing history of high-risk activism. Using a rare sample of participants and witnesses of wartime mobilization in Ukraine, this paper demonstrates that many paramilitary recruits volunteered to fight for the government not due to ethno-nationalism or social incentives, but driven by the war narratives prevalent in their locality. The emergence of collective perceptions favoring violent mobilization encouraged construction of obligations and influenced individual choices to join armed groups. While many paramilitary volunteers from the Left Bank already experienced high-risk activism, many others joined their battalions without prior experience, but convinced that mobilization was necessary. The two-stage mobilization chain, consisting of perception formation and the development of obligations to mobilize, was notable in individual mobilization pathways of many paramilitary volunteers in Kyiv.

Scholars have argued that participation in high-risk activism never follows the same pattern or logic. This study has shown that violent mobilization may occur irrespective of material greed, ethno-nationalist and political grievances, or structural dynamics, such as quotidian networks, social sanctions and incentives or threat perceptions. The belonging-driven mobilization, however, does not occur in a vacuum. As demonstrated by the empirical case of wartime mobilization in Kyiv, mobilization narratives are embedded in particular socio-political and socio-cultural contexts peculiar to the locale, which shapes individual perceptions and choices. While pre-existing experiences of high-risk activism that differ across localities, could explain part of this overall variation, individual-level heterogeneity in risk perceptions, political efficacy and interest may also explain why feelings of belonging do not homogeneously translate into action. Differences in political socialization, age, period and cohort effects could also impact perceptions of belonging, and shape grievances and attitudes. All of these factors warrant attention in future research on belonging as cause of violent mobilization.

The implication of this study is that violent mobilization cannot be viewed as detached from the locale. In order to improve our understanding of why some individuals join violent action while others tend to avoid it must be expanded to include such socio-psychological aspects as locality-specific narratives, and their imprint upon individual perceptions and choices. These findings are relevant for policies seeking to control violent mobilization and to de-escalate violent conflicts. Future research may look into factors that encourage the emergence of mobilization perceptions and obligations, as well as the effect of pre-existing history of mobilization. Bearing in mind that the phenomenon of “mobilization hubs” remains poorly understood there are multiple prospects for future studies to explain and analyze it.

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ The term violent mobilization refers to participation in armed conflict and is used in this study synonymously with high-risk activism and high-risk mobilization, as in other studies on mobilization in armed conflicts. See Mironova and Whitt (2019), Parkinson (2013).

ⁱⁱ The concept of belonging has also been central in research on collective memory, community and identity construction in sociology.

ⁱⁱⁱ See <https://in.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis/wrapup-2-ukraine-accuses-russia-of-opening-new-front-before-leaders-meeting-idINL5N0QV33V20140825>.

^{iv} While there is no verifiable data on the exact numbers of Russian and Ukrainian-speakers among the volunteer battalions in 2014, the consensus among interviewees was that there were about as many Russian-speakers as Ukrainian-speakers across the entire spectrum of paramilitary forces.

^v I conceptualize locality as a physical space, urban or rural area, neighborhood or a district. This conforms to presentation of locality in sociology, anthropology and ethnography.

^{vi} These multifaceted boundaries of belonging distinguish it from the “imagined communities” (Anderson 1991), which are built around a clearly-defined notion of a physical community.

^{vii} For example, see a recent study by the BBC <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-42863116>.

^{viii} Viterna (2006, 2) has argued that “there are multiple, conjunctural causes of mobilization, even among individuals embedded ... within similar structural context.” This might also be the case with belonging-driven mobilization, which may be filtered to various degrees through ethnicity, nationalism, political ideology, and individual grievances. While these factors leave an imprint on perceptions and obligations, they may also become part of narratives peculiar to a locality. Some locales may adopt more ethno-nationalist narratives than others.

^{ix} Four (4) members of different volunteer centers confirmed on the condition of anonymity that seven out of ten volunteers from Kyiv – who had joined volunteer battalions through their centers in Spring-Summer 2014 – had permanent addresses (*propiska*) at the Left Bank.

^x When the sample was last updated in September-October 2017, out of the first pool of 35 active combatants, 16 individuals confirmed their status as demobilized.

^{xi} The Left Bank of Kyiv encompasses 3 districts (Desnyansk`yi, Dniprovisky and Darnitsky) and has a population of 1,062,894 (2017). See (in Ukrainian): <http://www.kiev.ukrstat.gov.ua/p.php3?c=1123&lang=1>.

^{xii} I conducted interviews in Russian, which was the first language for 96% of informants. All informants described themselves as bilingual Ukrainian citizens and native speakers of both Russian and Ukrainian languages.

^{xiii} As described by Fujii (2010, 231), “meta-data” consists of “informants’ spoken and unspoken thoughts and feelings which they do not always articulate in their stories or interview responses, but which emerge in other ways.”

^{xiv} Each interviewee was assigned a fictitious name and their identifying details have been altered.

^{xv} Interestingly, “Azov” battalion received frequent donations from a powerful Ukrainian-Jewish oligarch, Ihor Kolomoyski, who holds dual Ukrainian-Israeli citizenship. See more at: <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2015/05/05/in-the-battle-between-ukraine-and-russian-separatists-shady-private-armies-take-the-field/>.

^{xvi} Quotidian networks are defined as everyday family and friendship networks, which could be both personal and localized (Wood 2008).

^{xvii} Conflict participants and witnesses across Kyiv were more or less unanimous in their perception of conflict in the East as something that “will not directly affect their lives.”

^{xviii} See *RiaNovostiUkraine* (in Russian): <https://rian.com.ua/columnist/20150207/363141410.html>.

^{xix} It is noteworthy that many battalion commanders are originally from “mobilization hubs” in eastern Ukraine, such as cities of Kharkov (Andriy Biletsky “Azov”), Dnipro (Yury Bereza “Dnipro-1”) and Donetsk (Semen Semchenko “Donbas”).

^{xx} “Self-Defense of Maidan” (*Samooborona Maydana*) were volunteer brigades assembled during the Euromaidan events to protect peaceful protesters at the Maidan square in Kyiv. The brigades were tasked by the Maidan leadership with maintaining law and order during protests. Brigades were organized into *sotnias* (hundreds) which imitated military organization of the Cossack armies of pre-Soviet Ukraine. Few members of “Self-Defense of Maidan” units were veterans of the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan, the First Chechen War, as well as of Ukraine’s mission to Iraq. See (in Ukrainian): <http://www.samooboronaua.org/>.

^{xxi} See (in Russian): <http://argumentua.com/stati/samooborona-maidana-simvolika-soten-uzhe-istoriya>.

^{xxii} Many of them were also veterans of Euromaidan.

^{xxiii} The Left Bank area of Kyiv was also a hub for environmental activism, booming since Ukraine's independence (see Cybriwsky 2016).

^{xxiv} According to various sources, partisan activity at the Left Bank of Dnieper river was so intense that in order to reduce popular support for partisans, the German military was forced to relocate most of its population to other parts of Ukraine, leaving in the Left Bank only 30 percent of its residents (Dubina 1945; Mulligan 1988; Lower 2005).