

**(IN)VISIBLE CARE:  
CIVILIAN VOLUNTEERISM  
IN WARTIME UKRAINE**

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## Abstract

An outburst of Euromaidan civilian protests in Ukraine and the subsequent ongoing Russian military invasion provoked a mass civilian engagement in volunteerism that eventually shaped a vital pillar of support for the society in crisis. In this thesis, I am turning towards the concept of 'volunteerism' as a form of informal work, contrary to its mainstream accounts of civil activism. Coupled with feminist theoretical elaborations on social reproduction, the thesis introduces voluntary work in Ukraine as a practice that sustains society in crisis and lacks recognition within larger power structures. This marks the entry point for sketching out the impact of contemporary neoliberal capitalism on social reproduction with a specific focus on the Ukrainian capitalist state. It becomes evident that the neoliberalisation project of Ukraine, propelled by international financial institutions and the Ukrainian political elites, stipulated a crisis of social reproduction that preconditioned the emergence of ubiquitous volunteerism and revealed its gender-based prerequisites in terms of mobilisation. By that, I argue that, despite conventional applications of volunteerism as a practice of a choice, in the Ukrainian context it is shaped as a strategy of survival in times of multiple crises. A close examination of the feminist volunteer initiative *Marsh Zhinok* in Kyiv employs a critical perspective on the organisation's methods and activities that offers a nuanced reading of its implications and opens up a capacity of volunteer work to transcend into a practice of collective solidarity.

## Introduction

Since 2014, the year of the biggest protests in Ukraine so far - known as the Revolution of Dignity or “Euromaidan”, the Ukrainian civil society movement mushroomed with a plethora of formal organisations and informal assemblies of individuals, striving for political change within the state. The followed-up geo-political conflict, entailing the annexation of the Crimea peninsula and the Russian military invasion into the eastern part of Ukraine, mobilised thousands of Ukrainians to plunge into volunteer work. This unfolded through raising funds, collecting clothes and military equipment, providing psychological help and legal aid amongst others. Shaped in an informal, bottom-up way, volunteerism in Ukraine developed into a form of moderately egalitarian and pro-democratic mobilisation of individuals, who faced the incapability of the state itself to deliver sustained support to the ones in need.<sup>1</sup> Once the Russian invasion escalated and extended throughout the whole terrain of Ukraine in February 2022, volunteerism increased in scale, unfolding a new phase of active voluntary practices. The acute effect of the newly emerged crisis was followed up by the omnipresent engagement of civilians that turned into a nationwide volunteer movement, moulding a crucial backbone for the society in crisis to rely on.

The unprecedented civic awakening demonstrated a profound self-organisation of the society in crisis. Though the mass mobilisation involved individuals of various social and economic statuses, the participation was distributed according to gender roles. Socialised through the role of breadwinner, cis-gender males forcibly or voluntarily enrolled into the Armed Forces of Ukraine, called by patriotic demands and gendered expectations to protect their country and their families. Thus, civilians at the rear, majorly women, were mobilised to deliver hands-on aid to the army and citizens in crisis (frequently ones that stayed in the conflict zones or internally displaced individuals). Forced by the national idea of the traditional Ukrainian womanhood restoration,<sup>2</sup> women were expected to care for men and the households. Therefore, mainly women plunged into volunteering activities,<sup>3</sup> cooperating for food preparation and clothing collection, evacuation from the conflict zones, and provision of temporary shelters that took the form of civilian volunteerism. Majorly driven by personal connection to the soldiers and the affected civilians in the conflict zones, Ukrainian women extended caring functions commonly performed in the private sphere, towards the public sphere.

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<sup>1</sup> Natalia Shapovalova and Olga Burluk, *Civil Society in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine: From Revolution to Consolidation* (Stuttgart: ibidem Press, 2018), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Tetiana Zhurzhenko, “Strong women, weak state: Family politics and nation building in post-Soviet Ukraine,” in *Post-soviet women encountering transition: Nation building, economic survival and civic activism*, ed. Kathleen Kuehnast & Carol Nechemias (Baltimore, MD and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press for the Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2004), 25.

<sup>3</sup> Oleh Kotsiuba, “The Rise of Volunteer Groups,” last modified October, 2015, <https://krytyka.com/en/articles/rise-volunteer-groups>.

The large scale of participation, public purpose, and collective nature of volunteerism revealed a productive attribute of this commonly defined as social reproductive work. While some volunteers acted individually, collecting needed items at homes, the significant engagement occurred within existent civil institutions, composed of charity and non-governmental organisations. Appropriation of residential spaces, as well as workplaces and public spaces for volunteer purposes, demonstrated how domestic work was spatially reorganised and obtained a socialised attribute.<sup>4</sup> Relying on social and material recourses, as well as infrastructure present within urban landscapes, volunteerism evolved into an omnipresent urban practice, where more than one-third of the registered organisations were concentrated in the capital of Ukraine, Kyiv.<sup>5</sup>

Enactment of voluntary work occurred due to the consolidated gendered skills, knowledge, and social resources that are commonly taken for granted due to feminised labour connotations. However, those who joined formal organisations or established their voluntary initiatives, evolved into workers, exercising the work similar to paid one in professionalised organisations. Full-time engagement, alongside the social orientation of the services, developed volunteer agency into a workforce, delivering life-sustaining work for free. Women, coming from different backgrounds and of various identity markers deliver a significant unrecognised work that maintains the functioning of society in times of crisis. Despite the ignorance of the Ukrainian state to consider this effort as a form of labour delivered to sustain its survival, this heterogeneous collective service of Ukrainian volunteers has been nurturing the society for almost a decade, which requires redefining the notion of work from a social, and not financial premise.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, due to the continuous support of individuals that require immediate help, agents of voluntary work ended up in a precarious condition, where executed work was acknowledged neither on an economic nor on a socio-political level. Nevertheless, the self-organised effort of volunteers to uphold the society in crisis was not only circumstanced by the economic and geopolitical crises but accompanied by a priorly dilapidating social reproduction infrastructure as a result of the neoliberal politics of Ukraine.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian state was recognised as a potential target for integration into the project of global capitalism. Positioned as a developing economy, Ukraine has been offered financial assistance by international financial institutions (IFIs) that promised stimulation of economic growth. The global financial aid entailed reorganisation of the political economy, prioritising market interests through the implementation of conventional neoliberal policies of deregulation, privatisation of public assets, and decline of social provision.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes Neighbourhoods and Cities*. (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1981), 5.

<sup>5</sup> "Charitable Activity in Ukraine 2015-2017," *Zagoriy Foundation*, December 28, 2019, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Melanie Oppenheimer, "Voluntary Work and Labour History," *Labour History*, no. 74 (1998), 4.

<sup>7</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 65.

Furthermore, it was accompanied by the concentration of power in the hands of a few oligarchs that led to the impoverishment of the masses and control of public policies in favour of political elites.

When in 2014 Ukraine faced a severe military crisis that stipulated an economic crisis, IFIs provided financial support in exchange for another set of structural adjustment programs in the form of austerity policies. This entailed the cutbacks of trade and labour regulations, coupled with severe 'optimisation' of the social welfare system that served as a promise for foreign capital inflow. However, what was dismissed is the effect of such policies on the social reproduction of society. In Soviet times the processes of social reproduction were distributed among state-led welfare public infrastructure and households that on the one hand facilitated the care functions for women, on the other hand, had a double burden effect, as women were expected to engage in paid productive labour. In sovereign Ukraine, it turned evident that the neoliberal regime pushes the social reproduction processes merely toward the private sphere that indicates how women's geographical constraints are bound to the demands of their care work.<sup>8</sup> Simultaneously, the public infrastructure has undergone a process of depreciation manifested through negligent public hospitals and schools, commodified public spaces, and the prevalence of private interests in urban mobility. Thus, exacerbating conditions for households to perform the processes of social reproduction, commonly appointed to women, it appears that the Ukrainian neoliberal state stretches the responsibility for the well-being of the society in crisis towards civilian volunteers, who are themselves struggling with sustaining themselves.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, accommodating gender expectations, women take the burden the most, performing the care work in the private sphere, while largely committing to volunteerism.

Thus, the following questions arise: How did wartime civilian volunteerism as an informal practice transform into a critical infrastructure that Ukrainian society relies on? How do the power structures within neoliberal state policies seek to regain control over those engaged in volunteering practices? And what are the potential trajectories for the recognition of volunteerism in post-war reconstruction project?

In this thesis, I deploy volunteerism as a crucial practice for Ukrainian society in times of crisis. I argue that, despite the frequent applications of volunteerism as a part of civic activism, it stands out as a typology of informal work that, despite the vast scope of performance, transpired as invisible. The chapter *The context of volunteerism as a care work in Ukraine* introduces a concise historical account of volunteerism, coupled

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<sup>8</sup> Cindi Katz and Janice Monk, "Making Connections: Space, Place and The Life Course," in *Life's Work: Geographies of Social Reproduction*, ed. Katharyne Mitchell et al. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 271.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer G Mathers, "Women, war and austerity: IFIs and the construction of gendered economic insecurities in Ukraine," *Review of International Political Economy* 27, no. 6, (2020): 1242.



with theoretical elaborations on social reproduction by seminal feminists such as Nancy Fraser, Silvia Federici, and Tithi Bhattacharya. Furthermore, the practice is situated in a specific geo-political context of the post-Soviet state that calls out to unpack the political transformations in the state. A thorough analysis of transformations within the political economy of Ukraine, manifested via the transition from a welfare state towards a neoliberal state, is fleshed out in the chapter *Crisis of transition in sovereign Ukraine*. As the transition of the Ukrainian political economy was fostered by the global capitalist system in the form of international financial institutions, I examine the impact of the novel reforms implemented through structural adjustment programs on the social reproduction processes and socio-economic conditions of its actors. This stands out as a point of departure for further analysis of the effect of such reorganisation on rise of civilian volunteerism.

In the following chapter *Volunteerism and gender implications in Ukraine*, I turn towards the events of 'Euromaidan' and military conflict in Eastern Ukraine, fleshing out the rise of civilian volunteerism and its gendered implications. Alongside this, the state's response to the crisis through the implementation of neoliberal austerity policies is analysed to display the aggravated condition for social reproduction processes. Binding the larger social reproduction conditions in Ukraine to the emerging and recently exacerbated military crisis contributes to a discussion on how power structures exercise their power through civilians, sustaining societies. Furthermore, commonly transferred functions of social reproduction to women provides a frame to sketch out the gendered impacts of the multitude of crises, as well as the larger ramifications of neoliberalisation. As an outbreak of the war throughout the whole state in 2022 stimulated a new phase of volunteerism, the chapter *Full-time for full-scale* addresses how global power structures benefitting from crumbling social reproduction in Ukraine that alongside reveals the tackling of the crisis by the Ukrainian capitalist state. While implementing several support programs for volunteerism, the state tends to lean towards sustained capital accumulation over societal needs. Furthermore, the iconic figure of Ukrainian volunteerism, the comedian Serhiy Prutyla similarly enacts his activism, calling out to ordinary civilians to tackle wartime needs. However, the precise focus on the profile of volunteers demonstrates the gendered patterns of participation that are introduced in the chapter.

Employing a more general term of voluntary work, the focus of this thesis is on civilian volunteerism, performed through physical and affective practices and exercised by formal organisations. The selection of civilian volunteerism is necessary to highlight the mobilisation of civilians for the social needs of vulnerable groups that plays out as an immediate instance of social welfare for the society. Furthermore, the agency of formal volunteer organisations resembles paid work practices and thus opens up the possibility to demonstrate the contemporary effects of performing social reproduction within the public realm. Though volunteerism is exercised not merely within formal organisations, but also individually, inquiry into formal organisations provides a comparative framework to the organisational structure of work, which supposedly does

not entail any financial remuneration. That's why the selection of *Marsh Zhinok* feminist volunteer initiative as a case study sets a frame for further inquiry.

The final chapter *Marsh Zhinok: case study* grounds volunteerism within the urban context of Kyiv, the headquarters for a plethora of volunteer organisations in the country. This part of the thesis investigates the agency of the feminist organisation *Marsh Zhinok* which since the full-scale invasion has engaged in voluntary work, supporting women affected by the military crisis. For this endeavour, I conducted multi-methodological research that encompasses ten days of ethnographic study, including participant observations as well as five semi-structured interviews and numerous informal conversations. This approach allowed me to comprehend the situated knowledge of volunteers that generated distinct perspectives on daily experiences of volunteer work and their positionalities in the complex structure of power relations. I also took on the role of a volunteer by participating in the provision of humanitarian aid (packing the food boxes, carrying the food and hygiene from storage to the packing room, and loading the truck), which was possible thanks to the minimal requirements to perform this work. 'Taking a role of the other' was beneficial to approach the context of volunteerism and grasp the meanings and motivations of participants to perform the work. As a supportive tool of inquiry, an autoethnographic method was employed to document and reflect on my personal experience of volunteerism and identify how the complexity of sensorial elements, material objects and discursive practices produces the space of volunteerism, as well as challenges the common norms of volunteerism.

However, there were several limitations to employ this method. Firstly, the short-term research revealed the shortage of establishing trust relationships that had an impact on the willingness of participants to allocate time and energy for communication, specifically for planned interviews. Secondly, the balance between social closeness and critical distance with the participants was difficult to maintain, with closeness prevailing over time. Furthermore, my privileged researcher position, whose presence in the space had a peculiar intention, affected the dynamic of interaction, where volunteers aimed to highlight mostly the positive aspects of work and their immense will to perform it. Additionally, as the communication with respondents was enclosed within *Marsh Zhinok* premises, most of the volunteers struggled to address the critique of the institutional performance of the organisation, as well as the broader political constraints to exercise volunteerism.

Nevertheless, the examination of broader socio-economic relations between the organisation and stakeholders involved, such as local government and international donors, addresses how power interests exercise control over the agency of volunteerism and dominant representations within the movement. Participation in private discussions on challenges of feminism in wartime, as well as an expert interview, conducted with Ukrainian feminist researcher Oksana Dutchak facilitated the understanding of structural socio-economic problems of Ukrainian women and the role of feminism to contest these issues. Alongside this, the spatial dynamics of the

organisation are examined through the dependence of *Marsh Zhinok* agency on urban infrastructure, such as public transportation and facilities for logistics. In this way, I pinpoint how urban policies and access to city infrastructure outline the conditions for volunteer work delivery. Considering that volunteerism serves as a form of invisible labour, I attempt to address the spatial qualities of the *Marsh Zhinok* volunteer hub and its impact on the power dynamic within the organisation.

Ultimately, this thesis aims to contribute to the discussion on issues of gendered labour in wartime Ukraine that while gaining greater attention, yet requires further visibility. Furthermore, it offers a space to amplify the voices of Ukrainian women, who are commonly silenced by the supremacy of capitalist-patriarchal representations. Though their daily work cannot be measured it stands out as critically valuable strategy to maintain Ukrainian society staying on track. While writing this work, I acknowledge the privilege of time and access to education that grants me the tools to work alongside them. We use different tools, but we stand with each other. And this is our way to resist. This is our way to hope.

# 1. The context of volunteerism as a care work in Ukraine

## 1.a. Applications of volunteerism

Volunteerism is a ubiquitous movement all around the world. Commonly it is associated with a rise of civil society that aims to promote political change, fight for a just world, and provide help to the communities and environments on the ground. The diversity of initiatives and practices has evolved from various socio-historic contexts and backgrounds. Since the development of urbanised and industrialised capitalism, community ties within agricultural societies appeared to be breaking apart. The shift towards alienation and individualism within societies provoked volunteerism to be a practice of maintaining the social bonds of people beyond their workplaces and households. However, these voluntary activities were merely sporadic initiatives to organise community life. The first organised volunteering movement unfolded in a break of wars, specifically the First World War, where youth and mostly women delivered help to wounded soldiers and collected supplies for them.<sup>10</sup>

While crisis preconditions active civic participation, contemporary understandings of volunteerism imply an empowering nature of practice to transform the world. Numerous initiatives all around the world encourage individuals to provide for others, pointing out their crucial contributions to the change. Though it stands out as an appealing opportunity for many, it does not necessarily turn out so. Argued by Nina Eliasoph in 'Politics of Volunteering', volunteerism, in contrast to political activism, takes the form of immediate, band-aid solutions that tend to disregard the strands of the structural problems.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the practices of volunteering are gaining momentum, frequently associated with acquiring new skills and knowledge, expanding personal resumes or meeting new people.

As part of civic engagement, volunteerism is a method of engagement in public matters, whether in the form of the provision of community services, aid to less privileged groups of society or concern for catastrophic environmental conditions. Noted by David Smith, volunteer participation is stipulated by a community aspect that is more present within small rural communities.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, the practice is blooming within urban environments, considered as a form of civic engagement. Participation in charity running marathons, delivering food to a neighbour or building a school for indigenous communities relies on public infrastructure and social capital present within cities.

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<sup>10</sup> "A short history of volunteering," VCLA, June, 2019, <https://vcla.net/a-short-history-of-volunteering/>.

<sup>11</sup> Nina Eliasoph, *The Politics of Volunteering* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 8.

<sup>12</sup> David Horton Smith, "Determinants of Voluntary Association Participation and Volunteering: A Literature Review," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 23, no. 3, (1994): 245.

The initial definition of volunteerism derives from French and carries a military connotation of choosing to join armed forces, without being forced to do it.<sup>13</sup> However, the contemporary implications of volunteerism are intrinsically entangled with humanitarian values that commonly take a form of charity. Traditionally in capitalist societies diverse forms of charity-related work were performed by white upper-middle-class women that established associations of social welfare for impoverished groups of society.<sup>14</sup> This illuminates that social status privileges presupposed commitment.

The term went through some transformations and currently, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, the verb to volunteer is defined broadly as “to offer to do something that you do not have to do, often without having been asked to do it and/or without expecting payment.”<sup>15</sup> It becomes evident that voluntary practice is a service that is stipulated by the participant’s willingness to engage without financial remuneration. Furthermore, another crucial component here is time which is a resource that every single one of us ideally has at one’s own disposal. However, it is significant to recognize how our time is being employed by the power structures and redistributed intersectionality within society. It “is about how we use our time, and even though we frequently do not have a choice about how we use it, it is the common denominator of exchange.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore the question arises, who has the sufficient capacity in terms of time and economic resources to perform this practice? And what does this work provide on a broader scale? While in Western societies voluntary practice is portrayed as an empowering and transformative civic activity, conveying the positive outcomes of participation, I propose to trace how volunteerism was evolving beyond that, particularly in Ukraine which exemplifies a post-socialist context and transformations within it.

### **1.b. Seeds of civic activism in post-socialist Ukraine**

The dissolution of the Soviet Union caused multiple crises across post-Soviet states. Extensive transformations of the political economy, followed up by severe economic insecurity, vast unemployment and political disorientation had a significant impact on the civic engagement of citizens, particularly in Ukraine. Millions of people faced inexcusable circumstances of existence that demanded to place private interests above the public. As known, the Soviet welfare state capitalism was manifested through the secure rights of workers and collectivity as a mechanism of action.<sup>17</sup> While

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<sup>13</sup> Online Etymology Dictionary, “volunteer,” <https://www.etymonline.com/word/volunteer> (accessed 11 February 2023).

<sup>14</sup> Sarah A. Curtis, “Charitable Ladies: Gender, Class and Religion in Mid Nineteenth-Century Paris,” *Past & Present*, no. 177 (2002): 124.

<sup>15</sup> Cambridge Dictionary, “volunteer”, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/volunteer> (accessed 11 February 2023).

<sup>16</sup> Marilyn Waring, *Counting for Nothing: What Men Value and What Women Are Worth*. (University of Toronto Press, 1999), xxxix.

<sup>17</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 11.

collectivity was entangled with any spheres of life, it signified a mandatory form of societal organisation, imposed by communist regime. Voluntary activities were one of them. As the flourishing of the state was placed above individual interests and freedoms, volunteerism had a highly ideological and patriotic meaning. Whether in the form of Saturday environment cleanings, activism within social organisations or cultural activities, volunteerism was performed as part of socially expected roles by the socialist state.<sup>18</sup> Systematically co-opted by communist regimes as a collective, compulsory activity to glorify the state, it was set as a form of unpaid labour.<sup>19</sup> Thus, volunteerism was robbed from its original meaning due to a forced nature of the practice, as well as by the threats of punishment measures for not exercising it. This had a strong negative impact on civic engagement after the dissolution of the Soviet Union that was also accompanied by economic hardships and reorientations towards well-being of the households by individuals.<sup>20</sup>

The transitional period of Ukraine has had a significant impact on civil society. Alongside the severe economic conditions, it was also inscribed into structural problems of post-Soviet societies. As spelled out by Marc Howard, civil societies in post-socialist states were perceived as weak, which serves as evidence of mistrust in state-controlled organisations, prevalence of informal friendships and family networks, as well as disappointment with political and economic transitions.<sup>21</sup> Traumatized by the compulsory nature of communist regime and struggles for financial well-being, society withdrew from public engagement for common issues. Although Ukraine has faced several revolutionary acts since its independence, the civic engagement remained low and has never evolved into an awakening of civil society. This was interpreted as an effect of Homo Sovieticus identity that encompasses passivity, reliance on personal networks and absence of political preferences.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, pre-Euromaidan civic activism was still present within public life in Ukraine. Mostly characterised by non-governmental institutions it evolved due to neoliberal political course that fostered active citizenship and entrepreneurship followed up by relying on oneself as a strategy to handle the transition.<sup>23</sup> The major financial assistance for civic activism was channelled from Western donors that, on

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<sup>18</sup> Natalia Govorukha, "The emergence of the volunteer movement in Ukraine 1991-2000," *Pedagogy of forming creative individuals at secondary and high school education* 63, no. 1 (2019): 12.

<sup>19</sup> Sandra Bell et al., "Volunteers on the Political Anvil – Citizenship and Volunteer Biodiversity Monitoring in Three Post-Communist Countries," *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 29, no. 1 (2011): 175.

<sup>20</sup> Nataliia Stepaniuk, "Wartime Civilian Mobilization: Demographic Profile, Motivations, and Pathways to Volunteer Engagement Amidst the Donbas War in Ukraine," *Nationalities Papers* (2022), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Marc Morje Howard, "The Weakness of Postcommunist Civil Society," *Journal of Democracy* 13 no. 1, (2002): 161.

<sup>22</sup> Kseniia Gatskova and Maxim Gatskov, "Third Sector in Ukraine: Civic Engagement Before and After the 'Euromaidan,'" *Voluntas* 27, no. 2 (2016): 680.

<sup>23</sup> Sarah D. Phillips, *Women's social activism in the new Ukraine: Development and the politics of differentiation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 7.

the one hand promoted equality and diversity, while on the other hand, focused mainly on individual interests that resulted in supporting the organisation itself, instead of interests of the society.<sup>24</sup> While institutionalised organisations received the most support and visibility, the informal, grassroots initiatives were disregarded. The struggle for financial support and visibility demonstrated contemporary limitations of marketized politics, where success of civic organisations was measured by its monetary value.<sup>25</sup>

While gendered profile was rather equal in terms of participation, the spheres of civic activism were clearly demarcated, where men got involved into more prestigious spheres, such as human rights, civic education, politics and economy, while women dealt with social issues.<sup>26</sup> Often being part of marginalised groups, women were urged to participate due to their caring manner of handling social and personal problems, alongside limited access to paid job opportunities.<sup>27</sup> This illustrates that women's commitment to activism was preconditioned not merely by the call of their heart, but stands out as a result of structural socio-economic inequalities. Hence, it is vital to address how voluntary women's participation is within civic engagement in Ukraine.

### **1.c. Volunteerism as social reproductive labour**

According to Marx's theoretical framework of historical materialism it is claimed that economy presupposes functioning of any human institutions. Consequently, every individual is constrained to undertake economic practices that are pinpointed as a prerequisite for humans' existence.<sup>28</sup> Known as a productive labour, it bears a concrete exchange value that turns into a contribution to the formal economy and determines the rank of economies on the global scale. Idealised understanding of capitalism assumes that individuals are engaged into a productive labour that sustains their personal existence and their households in a form of wages. However, what infallibly stays omitted is how the individuals are being turned into workers initially and how they are being sustained. The everyday practices of upbringing the to-be worker, maintenance of the household for the worker, as well as nurturing broader communities are known as processes of social reproduction.

Stemming from Marxist feminist intellectual thought, the material and affective practices traditionally performed by women, take a form of care labour (that oftentimes

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<sup>24</sup> Orysia Lutsevych, "How to Finish a Revolution: Civil Society and Democracy in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine," *Briefing Paper in Chatham House* (2013): 15-16.

<sup>25</sup> Eliasoph, *The Politics of Volunteering*, 102.

<sup>26</sup> Lyubov Palyvoda et al., *Civil Society Organizations in Ukraine: The State and Dynamics 2002–2005* (Kyiv: Macros, 2006), 92.

<sup>27</sup> Phillips, *Women's social activism in the new Ukraine*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Karl Marx, "Human Requirements and Division of Labour Under the Rule of Private Property," *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/needs.htm>, (accessed 18 February 2023).

is not recognised as one.) A prominent definition of care, proposed by Joan Tronto and Berenice Fischer expressed in the “activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible.”<sup>29</sup> Though the broad term is not necessarily allocated to the private sphere, in feminist strand of thoughts it is frequently applied as domesticized labour. Silvia Federici points out that division of labour under capitalism imposed a belief of natural determination of women to exercise housework.<sup>30</sup> While men were involved in a production sphere, and considered as a labour force, women were assigned with a role of carer in a form of maintaining the household and raising toddlers. Originating from a belief that women are emotional human beings, the practices of nurturing and caring casted as «feminine» work.<sup>31</sup> Arlene Daniels emphasised that while formal work is enacted and remunerated according to skills and education of the workers, the ‘women’s work’ is not acknowledged as one, requiring any effort. The lack of validation placed social reproduction as work that is unnecessary to be paid for.

While social reproduction feeds on the idea of domesticized practice, this work is allocated to the private sphere. Argued by feminist scholar Tithi Bhattacharya, “labour power is the sole commodity, which is produced outside of the circuit of commodity production”.<sup>32</sup> Thus, spatially social reproduction of the workforce is defined through the home. Performed beyond the formal workplace and supported by the idea of ‘naturalised’ labour, caring for the households is not acknowledged as labour per se, thus does not entail any financial remuneration. The value of this work is rather unheeding, oriented mostly to continuous capital accumulation. As a proposal, feminist economist Marilyn Waring suggests the imputation, which is an attribution of monetary valuation to unpaid work in order to make this work visible.<sup>33</sup> Another revolutionary approach was introduced by an urban historian Dolores Hayden, who declared the significance of women’s control over reproduction in economic terms, as well as spatial reorganisation of social reproduction that must take a form of socialised domestic work.<sup>34</sup> It is emphasised that once housework becomes a public matter, exercised within urban fabric its visibility and appreciation will grow.

Turning towards voluntary work as a provision of service to broader communities, it becomes apparent that it stands out as part of social reproductive labour. While care within household presupposes social responsibility, built on relative kinship<sup>35</sup>,

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<sup>29</sup> Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 103.

<sup>30</sup> Silvia Federici, *Wages Against Housework* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press and the Power of Women Collective, 1975), 77.

<sup>31</sup> Arlene Kaplan Daniels, “Invisible Work,” *Social Problems* 34, no. 5 (1987): 408.

<sup>32</sup> Tithi Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (Pluto Press, 2017), 7.

<sup>33</sup> Waring, *Counting for Nothing*, 6.

<sup>34</sup> Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, 5.

<sup>35</sup> John Wilson and Marc A. Musick, *Volunteers: A Social Profile* (Indiana University Press, 2008), 24.



voluntary work is performed beyond familial circles and committed to deliver community services, as well as support social groups without any obligations to do so. Conceived as an altruistic practice that aims to support those in need, volunteerism is propelled through engagement in public affairs and contribution to the collective good. In contrast to housework that is separated from the public realm and commonly rendered insignificant, hence unpaid, voluntary work stands out as “unpaid work in a public sphere”.<sup>36</sup> A close look at voluntary work within the civic engagement movement demonstrates that those, mobilised to exercise it within formal organisations or initiatives, are performing work, similar to the waged one. The diversity of voluntary practices requires specific knowledge and skills, which are commonly predominated by the affective aspirations of volunteers. This renders volunteer labour invisible within formal economies that interrogates its impact on society and sustained capital accumulation.

For this endeavour, I examine the rise of volunteerism in the specific context of wartime Ukraine, where volunteerism emerged as a bottom-up response to a bundle of crises, occurring in Ukraine since its independence. Tracing the evolution of the practice as informal work, I situate it alongside simultaneous socio-economic processes that influenced the formation of volunteerism as a fundamental practice of care. Furthermore, I address how gendered expectations and division of labour constituted volunteerism in wartime Ukraine. Though, it is not limited by women’s participation, I highlight that women take the biggest share in Ukrainian civilian volunteerism, which will be addressed further.

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<sup>36</sup> Oppenheimer, “Voluntary Work and Labour History,” 4.

## 2. Crisis of transition in sovereign Ukraine

### 2.a. An upsurge of kleptocratic neoliberal regime

In Ukraine, the neoliberal project unfolded in the 1990s. Alongside the gained sovereignty of the Ukrainian state, the idea of freedom, underlying the neoliberal norm, was supported as an alternative project to the state-centralised economy of the Soviet state. The premise of the Ukrainian state as a new-born, developing project constituted the interest for global capital to flow in, modifying its political economy according to the market interests. This process is commonly known as neoliberalisation which aligns every sphere of life with the values of market exchange.<sup>37</sup> According to dominant Western imaginations, neoliberalisation is introduced as an inevitable project that encompasses a loose movement of capital and tight control on the movement of labour.<sup>38</sup> In Ukraine, these processes were integrated through market fetishisation as well as regulation and taxation policies that became the backbone of the political regime in the state.<sup>39</sup>

The governance of independent Ukraine was taken over by a few criminal-political elites that privatised 80% of the state's economic resources.<sup>40</sup> Rapid informal accumulation of public resources by power groups took a turn to shape the oligarchic regime in Ukraine. The methods of governance were characterised by corruption that as noted by Vlad Mykhnenko stands out as an effect of weak and undeveloped states.<sup>41</sup> Eventually the political economy in Ukraine turned into a kleptocratic neoliberal regime that demonstrated peculiar gendered tendencies within power elites. Firstly, the lion's share of oligarchs is men. Secondly, the preference lies in masculinized sectors development, such as energy, mining, heavy industry and defence industry. Thirdly, the influential connection of oligarchs and politicians, performed in a form of favouring key oligarchy-sponsored sectors, while getting the funding for political agency and focusing their influence within certain areas in order to amplify their political power.<sup>42</sup> While male-dominated political and economic spheres directed towards incorporation of neoliberal project, effects are called to be interrogated.

Accumulated and privatised state capital within hands of few (mostly oligarchy) had a profound impact on Ukrainian economy and socio-economic condition of the society.

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<sup>37</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Doreen B. Massey, *For space* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 4.

<sup>39</sup> Yuliya Yurchenko, *Ukraine and the Empire of Capital* (Pluto Press, 2017), 8.

<sup>40</sup> Oleh Bilorus and Mykola Pavlovsky, "Judgment Day will come for criminal oligarchs," *Voice of Ukraine* (2001): 18.

<sup>41</sup> Adam Swain et al., "The Corruption Industry and Transition: Neoliberalising Post-Soviet Space?," in *Rise and Fall of Neoliberalism: The Collapse of an Economic Order?* ed. Kevin Birch & Vlad Mykhnenko (London: Zed Books, 2010), 119.

<sup>42</sup> Mathers, "Women, war and austerity", 1240.

While the formal economy in the 1990s was facing a severe shrinking, evident in a fall of GDP by two-thirds and a 50% decline in food production, the gap between rich and poor has widened up to forty times.<sup>43</sup> The majority of the Ukrainian population has reached acute poverty which was reflected in official data on the Ukrainian economy, making Ukraine one of the poorest countries in Europe for several decades.<sup>44</sup> However, it is crucial to shed light that the internal factors were not the primary reason for that. Thus, here I would like to discuss how global capital in the form of international financial institutions affected the disastrous circumstances of the Ukrainian political economy. While disentangling the applied strategies of neoliberalisation by international financial institutions (IFIs), I intend to reveal their gendered influence on the socio-economic condition of Ukrainian society.

### **2.b. The effects of ‘shock therapy’ on social welfare**

IFIs are established as key players in neoliberalising the global peripheries, which are commonly known as developing economies. As a precondition for potential neoliberalisation, as named by Harvey, internalities must be at their weakest<sup>45</sup>, which in Ukraine was manifested through economic turmoil in the 1990s. As a response to that, IFIs, particularly the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank came to the rescue, offering financial support to the Ukrainian state. However, appealing promises to stimulate economic growth and boost the influx of foreign investments materialised at the cost of a comprehensive reorganisation of the political economy. This entailed deregulation and financialisation of the economy, as well as extensive privatisation of public assets. To justify the transformations, also known as ‘shock therapy’, IFIs employed the anti-corruption arguments that served as a frequent tool to validate market fundamentalist principles within post-Soviet states.<sup>46</sup> An effort to eradicate bribery and corruption practices in the management of public resources was accompanied by weaving ‘one size fits all’ neoliberal policies as a regulatory and controlling instrument of economic development. This demonstrates that post-Soviet neoliberalisation is propelled by the elimination of unfavourable political and economic peculiarities of the state.

As already hinted at, the reorganisation of the political economy that was propelled through structural adjustment programs had an extreme impact on various institutions, priorly functioning according to the planned economic rules. One of them took a form of optimisation of provision of social welfare that in neoliberal states is commonly implemented through public spending cut-outs and privatisation of public services.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> “Implementation of Ukrainian Constitution. Tendencies towards exacerbation of political life, economic crisis and social problems (1994-2004).”, *Educational Platform ‘Academia’*, <http://zno.academia.in.ua/mod/book/view.php?id=3420> (accessed 06 May 2023).

<sup>44</sup> Ukraine Poverty Rate 1992-2023, [www.macrotrends.net](http://www.macrotrends.net), (assessed 22 March 2023).

<sup>45</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 117.

<sup>46</sup> Swain et al., “The Corruption Industry and Transition”, 113.

<sup>47</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 23.

Sustained by relying-on-oneself logic, the social welfare provision is considered insignificant and is treated as a burden for economic development within neoliberal capitalism. However, this idea overlooks the structural socio-economic inequalities of individuals and commonly impairs the most vulnerable groups of society.<sup>48</sup> In the next section, I trace how social reproduction in Ukraine was constituted by the provision of social welfare and a glimpse into its gendered impacts.

### 2.c. Towards the crisis of care



**Figure 1.** *Ukrainian woman at the kitchen in the early 1990s. Photo by Katherine Turczan.*

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<sup>48</sup> Tetiana Zhurzhenko, "Ukrainian Women in the Transitional Economy," *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* 60, (1998).

As noted above, social reproduction in its broad sense is historically relegated to women, and Ukraine is no exception. Since Ukraine was declared as an independent state, the traditional role of women was celebrated, manifested through the image of a caregiver that is willing to sacrifice her interests and devote herself to the maintenance of the household and her family.<sup>49</sup> In addition to their role as caregivers, women in Ukraine have also been vastly represented within public sector occupations, making up to 80% of employees in education, health and social services.<sup>50</sup> As a result, women have played a significant role in these sectors, contributing not only to the provision of social reproduction within households but also to the overall well-being and functioning of Ukrainian society.

The state-owned public sector in Ukraine plays a crucial role in providing social welfare services, including healthcare, education, and other social services that contribute to the overall well-being of society. This emphasis on state-organised welfare provision can be traced back to the Soviet legacy of centralised planning, where the sector played a significant role in sustaining Soviet citizens and promoting communist ideology. However, the introduction of neoliberal policies and the push for welfare optimisation had significant consequences for the social reproduction sphere in Ukraine. This stands for, as argued by Nancy Fraser, a crisis of care that entails a paradoxical nature of capital. While neoliberal capitalism relies on social reproduction, its aspiration for sustained accumulation destabilising the processes of social reproduction.<sup>51</sup> This was also evident in the urban fabric of Ukraine, when the numerous public institutions, hospitals, schools and day-care centres were gradually deteriorating that demonstrates that crisis of care is reflected within cities that act as a collective political project.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, in the Ukrainian context the tightening of social reproduction processes were accompanied by a dispossession of the labour force that eventually provoked another crisis known as the protests of Euromaidan.

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<sup>49</sup> Oksana Kis, "(Re)Constructing Ukrainian women's history: Actors, authors, and narratives," *Gender, politics, and society in Ukraine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 154-158.

<sup>50</sup> Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, "*The effects of Intervention by International Financial Institutions on Women's Human Rights in Ukraine*," *Joint Shadow Report, CEDAW Committee* (2017), <https://wilpf.org/wilpf-publications/>.

<sup>51</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care," *New Left Review* 100, no. 4 (July-August 2016): 100.

<sup>52</sup> Angelika Gabauer et al., *Care and the City: Encounters with Urban Studies* (Routledge, 2021), 3.

### 3. Volunteerism and gender implications in Ukraine

#### 3.a. Euromaidan as a point of no return

As noted above, since the 1990s the ruling bloc was composed of industry-owning oligarchs from Eastern Ukraine that were intertwined within economic and political sectors.<sup>53</sup> On one hand, the Ukrainian economy was highly dependent on Russian gas, on the other hand, it remained a target for Western capital flows. Political elites balanced in-between those power structures while integrating the state into acute poverty. The consequences of short-term political approaches, while reinforcing the private budgets of affluent elites through corruption turned towards the inexcusable move of the former government ruled by president Viktor Yanukovich to withdraw from the EU-association treaty, while simultaneously appealing to Russian resource-oriented capitalism.<sup>54</sup> This caused one of the most expansive crises in Ukraine and serves as evidence that crisis is not a temporary phase, but “the mode of existence of modern societies on a world scale.”<sup>55</sup>



**Figure 2.** Euromaidan protests. December 2013. Source: Ukrinform, 2019.

An outburst of Euromaidan protests from November 2013 at Maidan square in the centre of Kyiv has demonstrated a clash of perspectives between the former political

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<sup>53</sup> Yurchenko, *Ukraine and the Empire of Capital*, 15-16.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 152-153.

<sup>55</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: The One-Volume Edition* (London: Verso, 2014), 713.

course of the state and the interests of the society. It is noted, that the survey conducted at the Maidan in December 2013 illustrated that 92% of participants did not have any political or civic activism affiliations, and were driven by police repressions of the protesters, the president's refusal to sign the Ukraine-EU association agreement and aspirations for change in Ukraine.<sup>56</sup> This is exemplified through mobilisation of individuals across geographies, socio-economic statuses and political interests. As noted by Yulia Yurchenko, the protests were not ideologically charged, as commonly appear to be, but played out as a resistant reactionary response to the actions of political elites that strive for capital and power accumulation across broader capital instances, such as Ukrainian oligarchs, the EU, the USA and Russian business.<sup>57</sup>

Even though Euromaidan protests took the form of mass mobilisation of many, the participation of protesters was distributed according to gender roles. While the forefront of clashes was dominated by men, women were assigned with caring and nurturing functions, protecting and supporting the men.<sup>58</sup> Hence, mostly women were helping at the self-organised kitchens, providing first medical aid and emotionally cheering the male protesters. As women were predominantly conceived as emotional individuals, their altruistic aspirations in a form of care labour were taken for granted that commonly does not entail any material or symbolic recognition.<sup>59</sup> Thus, collective mobilisation for Euromaidan protests feeds on women's labour delivered to sustain the male protesters, thus the Euromaidan itself.



**Figure 3.** Still from "Women of Maidan", directed by Olha Onyshko (2016). Source: IMDb.

<sup>56</sup> Iryna Bekeshkina and Oleksiy Khmelko, "Maidan-2013: who is protesting, why and for what?" (Kyiv: Democratic Initiatives Foundation and Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 2013), <https://kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=216>.

<sup>57</sup> Yurchenko, *Ukraine and the Empire of Capital*, 18.

<sup>58</sup> Olesya Khromeychuk, "Gender and Nationalism on the Maidan," In *Ukraine's Euromaidan: Analyses of a civil revolution*, ed. David R. Marples and Frederick V. Mills (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2015), 124.

<sup>59</sup> Charlotte Overgaard, "Rethinking Volunteering as a Form of Unpaid Work," *Non-profit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 48, no. 1, (2019): 139.

### 3.b. Wartime women's mobilisation

The Euromaidan protests in Ukraine led to significant political and economic destabilisation, resulting in the overthrow of the Viktor Yanukovich regime and a redistribution of power among existing political elites. This was followed by the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Russian forces into the Eastern part of Ukraine. The Eastern region, influenced by propagandistic manipulations from the Russian state, faced a military and humanitarian crisis that had a profound impact on the entire country. Alongside this, the state's weakness and widespread corruption entailed the incapability to adequately support society during the crisis. This was exemplified in the Ministry of Defence's appeal to the households to fund the Ukrainian Armed Forces for medical and logistics support<sup>60</sup>, while oligarchs accumulated state finances. As a result, civic engagement and volunteerism rose significantly and took a form of service delivery approach to substitute the functions of the state, that on the one hand had a strengthening effect on the state, while on the other hand led to a further weakening of it.<sup>61</sup>

Consequently, the invasion marked the beginning of a new phase of volunteer engagement, focused on providing assistance related to the armed conflict.<sup>62</sup> Since then, volunteerism became closely intertwined with military and humanitarian consequences. A UN survey conducted in 2014 revealed the existence of 750 volunteer organisations with 75,000 individuals supporting the military forces and internally displaced persons.<sup>63</sup> However, the distribution of volunteer work was uneven, with a greater emphasis on aiding the army compared to supporting displaced civilians or those living in conflict zones.<sup>64</sup> For many, volunteerism during the conflict in Eastern Ukraine was seen as a continuation of the spirit of the Euromaidan protests, driven by a collective commitment to build a better future for the country.<sup>65</sup> Due to an evident success of previous phase of mobilisation, illustrated by the elimination of the former government, volunteers were motivated to pursue their actions. Euromaidan served as a venue for encountering diverse groups, as well as the platform for experimenting with organisational approaches, hence, the wartime volunteer initiatives

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<sup>60</sup> Deborah Sanders, "The war we want; the war that we get': Ukraine's military reform and the conflict in the east," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 30, no. 1 (2017): 40.

<sup>61</sup> Kateryna Zarembo, "Doing State's Job: The Impact of Volunteers on State Defense Capacity in post-Euromaidan Ukraine," in *Civil Society in post-Euromaidan Ukraine: From Revolution to Consolidation*, ed. Natalia Shapovalova and Olha Burlyuk (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2018), 102.

<sup>62</sup> Oksana Pankova, "The development of volunteer activity in Ukraine as a demonstration of civil society social resources activation: specificity, problems and perspectives," *Ukrainian socium* 2, no. 57 (2016): 27.

<sup>63</sup> Volonterskoie dvizhenie, "Volonterskoie dvizhenie Ukrainy v tsyfrakh i faktakh (infografika)," *Segodnia*, April 11, 2014, <https://bit.ly/2Hwn9EW>.

<sup>64</sup> "Charitable Activity in Ukraine 2015-2017," *Zagoriy Foundation*, December 28, 2019.

<sup>65</sup> Stepaniuk, "Wartime Civilian Mobilization," 8.



developed, relying on organisational innovations, knowledge and networks developed at the protests.<sup>66</sup>

The gender patterns of wartime volunteerism demonstrated women's prevalence of volunteer participation.<sup>67</sup> Though some women still joined the army, their share in 2014 was less than 1%.<sup>68</sup> Hence, women at rear primarily engaged in cooking, assisting in hospitals, and providing clothing for soldiers. Humanitarian and medical aid delivered by women volunteers underlines a traditional feminised labour that was relegated to women, reinforcing their position within militarised society. Playing along the societal trend of women's caring role as for households, so for vulnerable groups of society, female volunteers enacted it towards soldiers, a newly emerged vulnerable group in wartime Ukraine.<sup>69</sup> As argued by a researcher of Ukrainian volunteerism Ioulia Shukan, the volunteer's involvement was affected by "the shortcomings of the military system of care".<sup>70</sup> This demonstrates that the state's inability to support the groups affected by the conflict led to the transfer of these responsibilities to women volunteers.

Another exacerbated factor for the condition of women was the militarisation of society. A significant portion of society mobilised for collective resistance through military protection of the territories and volunteerism at the rear. However, it is important to recognise that the conflict was not solely orchestrated by the Russian imperialist state, but also influenced by global capitalist and imperial interests that entailed dispossession of the society through mechanisms of militarisation and austerity measures.<sup>71</sup> The economic effects of those processes are evident in increased financial support for the defence sector at the expense of humanitarian assistance. While capital accumulation occurs within a defence sector at the cost of public spending cuts, it is justified through the 'national security' discourse. From feminist political economy standpoint militarisation is developed through the idea of prioritising the war needs over civilian life and manipulating with the gendered notions of patriotism.<sup>72</sup> While the state takes an apparent stance on prioritising the defence, the burden of volunteer labour was placed on the households to compensate for the

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<sup>66</sup> Susan Worschech, "New Civic Activism in Ukraine: Building Society from Scratch?," *Kyiv-Mohyla Law and Politics Journal* 3 (2017): 32.

<sup>67</sup> Stepaniuk, "Wartime Civilian Mobilization," 6.

<sup>68</sup> Ganna Grytsenko, "*Invisible battalion*": women's participation in ATO military operations (sociological research), ed. Ganna Grytsenko et al. (Kyiv: The Ukrainian Women's Fund, 2016).

<sup>69</sup> Mathers, "Women, war and austerity," 1248.

<sup>70</sup> Ioulia Shukan, "Gender Roles in the Rear of the War in Donbas: Women's Engagement in the Care of Wounded Combatants," in *Gender and Power in Eastern Europe: Changing Concepts of Femininity and Masculinity in Power Relations*, ed. Katharina Bluhm et al., (Springer Nature, 2020), 84.

<sup>71</sup> Olena Lyubchenko, "On the Frontier of Whiteness? Expropriation, War, and Social Reproduction in Ukraine," *LeftEast*, 30 April 2022, <https://lefteast.org/frontiers-of-whiteness-expropriation-war-social-reproduction-in-ukraine/>.

<sup>72</sup> Maya Eichler, *Militarizing men: Gender, conscription, and war in post-soviet Russia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 7.

expected state support.<sup>73</sup> Demanded by a sense of moral patriotic duty, since 2014 Ukrainian society has endured the hardships of a geopolitical crisis, driven by the power elites of Ukraine, Russia, and the West, with the least prosperous individuals being called upon to perform unpaid labour to sustain society.

### 3.c. Gendered effects of austerity policies

Since 2008 the world has faced a severe economic crisis that had acutely affected the developing economies. As the Ukrainian economy had already been witnessing severe economic hardships, as noted before, the global economic crisis solely exacerbated the situation. Furthermore, an outbreak of military conflict established an impossible condition for the Ukrainian economy to operate. Thus, international financial institutions, mostly the International Monetary Fund (IMF), offered another round of financial aid for the state in a deep crisis. The effort to tackle the problem was introduced through the liberalisation of prices and trade, implementation of fiscal and monetary policies to stabilise inflation and enactment of deregulatory structural reforms, affecting the energy sector and provision of social welfare.<sup>74</sup> This means that while Ukraine was pressured to re-establish the export price for global competition, employment and real wages were kept down. Furthermore, the deficit of the state budget was entailed to be fixed by increasing taxes and reducing public spending, particularly on social welfare, as well as decrease of state subsidies on energy use for households.<sup>75</sup> Taking a form of austerity policies, also known as ‘anti-crisis’ measures the adjustments were employed by IFIs to justify ‘rescuing’ the economy in crisis. The enthusiasm of the Ukrainian government to reorganise the political economy, and the social welfare sector in particular, was propelled by the rhetoric of ‘one step closer’ to European norms. However, what stayed disregarded is who pays the cost of the state budget gain. Thus, it is important to address how austerity policies affected social reproduction, the infrastructure it relies upon and its major actors that commonly identify themselves as women.

According to political economist Mark Blyth: “Austerity is a form of voluntary deflation in which the economy adjusts through the reduction of wages, prices, and public spending to restore competitiveness, which is (supposedly) best achieved by cutting the state’s budget, debts, and deficits.”<sup>76</sup> In Ukrainian case the imposed austerity policies had an apparent effect on gender inequality that has already been exacerbated by the wartime circumstances. Firstly, it was evident in the depreciation

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<sup>73</sup> Mathers, “Women, war and austerity,” 1246.

<sup>74</sup> World Bank. *Ukraine economic update*. (Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, 2008). <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/222231468110333401/Ukraine-economic-update-December-2008>.

<sup>75</sup> Jennifer G. Mathers, “Women, war and austerity: IFIs and the construction of gendered economic insecurities in Ukraine,” *Review of International Political Economy* 27 (6), (2020): 1238.

<sup>76</sup> Mark Blyth, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea*, (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2.

of reproductive labour that was stipulated by the subsidy' cuts for childbirth, maternity leave and care for disabled individuals and legitimised by crisis inflation.<sup>77</sup> Though the support for single-parent households increased, the condition of receiving it was demanded by the absence of any income. This demonstrates that care within households is increasingly being transferred to the households themselves, and was supported solely according to the poverty factor.

Another measure was introduced through the large healthcare reform that involved the privatisation of healthcare services and elimination of 'unnecessary' hospitals, mostly in rural areas.<sup>78</sup> Once public medical assistance turned out to be inaccessible, the households themselves were expected to provide the support. Furthermore, the shutdown of the hospitals entailed a profound unemployment for women, who commonly more recruited in a medical sphere. However, this was not an only case of austerity measures on female 'productive' labour. The decrease of public servants up to 10%, dismissal of thousands education workers, and destruction of social work institutions served as an outcome of the public spending cuts. Thus, thousands of women employed in this sector lost their jobs or found themselves with lowered wages, which was a devastating addition to the already existing wide wage gap.<sup>79</sup> Being in a precarious labour condition, under constant threat of being fired, women are more likely to engage into practices that are not part of the formal economy. What is interesting is that reduction in public spending impacted women on two levels, as they are the ones employed in this sector the most, and also are primary beneficiaries of social spending.<sup>80</sup> Even though men are also fighting against the consequences of such policies, women are the ones, feeling the burden the most. Hence, while 'optimisation' policies are aiming to secure the flow of capital into the state oligarchy in order to cope with the crisis, the responsibility is placed on those, who have the least access to economic and social security.

Thus, the austerity policies, conditioned by IFIs, are having gendered ramifications. While squeezing the social spending for women's labour and economic security, the demands on their unpaid labour are increased. This plays out as a toughening mechanism to existing gendered social and economic pressures of militarisation.<sup>81</sup> The lion's share of women, who experienced the consequences of militarisation are internally-displaced women. In 2016 the share of women among internally-displaced

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<sup>77</sup> Oksana Dutchak, *Crisis, War and Austerity: Devaluation of Female Labor and Retreating of the State* (Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2018), 32.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>79</sup> "Millennium Development Goals Ukraine: 2000–2015," *UNDP*. Access mode: <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/ukraine/docs/PR/2015%20MDGs%20Ukraine%20Report%20engl.pdf>, 43.

<sup>80</sup> Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, "The effects of Intervention by International Financial Institutions on Women's Human Rights in Ukraine," *Joint Shadow Report, CEDAW Committee* (2017), <https://wilpf.org/wilpf-publications/>.

<sup>81</sup> Mathers, "Women, war and austerity," 1247.

people was 62%<sup>82</sup>, while in August 2022 out of approximately seven million internally displaced individuals, 70% were women.<sup>83</sup> Encountering hardships of displacement, women are placed in a highly vulnerable condition. Accompanied by the dilapidation of social reproduction infrastructure and economic insecurity, women experience double effects, as from displacement, so from austerity state measures. Thus, internally displaced women are representing one of the social groups that are requiring the support the most.

As noted above, the political landscape of oligarchic groups represented by men and supporting heavy industries demonstrates the gender-charged pathways of the political economy in Ukraine. This serves as an explanation for the implementation of austerity policies, delivered alongside the shrinkage of social welfare and economic support of the households, placing a heavier burden on poorly paid or unpaid labour of women. The forced circumstances assume women's labour as a source for households, communities and the state to survive, which is known as the 'feminisation of survival'.<sup>84</sup>

In Ukraine, this condition advanced up to the absolute dependency of an affluent oligarchy and political elites on the unpaid labour of women.<sup>85</sup> While women already represent the majority of actors within the informal economy, the acceleration of austerity policies by power elites is just reinforcing their vulnerable and precarious status by pushing them to perform low-paid, informal or unpaid work. Here, it turns out that while volunteerism is commonly considered as the action performed willingly, in Ukraine the myriad of crises, composed of economic transitional hardships, war in Eastern Ukraine, and subsequent austerity reforms constituted the impossible condition for women to rely on their socio-economic security. Furthermore, the assigned gender role of a care-giver, pushed numerous women to react towards the call of support and aid, not only within their household, but also towards broader communities. While being well represented in voluntary and NGO-sectors prior to the armed conflict<sup>86</sup>, women engaged in a vast variety of voluntary work practices, shaping a crucial workforce for the state in an evident crisis.

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<sup>82</sup> Valentyna Smal, "The grand migration: how many internally displaced people in Ukraine in reality?," *Vox Ukraine*, last modified June 2016, <https://voxukraine.org/uk/velyke-pereselennya-skilky-naspravdi-v-ukraini-vpo-ua/>.

<sup>83</sup> "Ukraine - Internal Displacement Report - General Population Survey Round 8," *International Organisation of Migration* (Global Data Institute Displacement Matrix, 17-23 August 2022), <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/ukraine-internal-displacement-report-general-population-survey-round-8-17-23-august-2022?close=true>, 5.

<sup>84</sup> Saskia Sassen, "Women's burden: Counter-geographies of globalization and the feminization of survival," *Journal of International Affairs* 53, no.2 (2000): 506.

<sup>85</sup> Mathers, "Women, war and austerity," 1242.

<sup>86</sup> Phillips, *Women's social activism in the new Ukraine*, 77-78.

## 4. Full-time for full-scale

### 4.a. The global interests in warfare

After several years of intense volunteering, it took various forms. While some initiatives dissolved due to the absence of financial support and social capital, others professionalised and engaged whether in public affairs or cooperated with state institutions. However, in February 2022 the volunteerism aroused again on a bigger scale and stretched across the whole territory of Ukraine due to a full-scale attack on Ukraine by Russia.

An outburst of military conflict throughout the whole territory of Ukraine has become an unexpected challenge for the Ukrainian society and state, as well as for the global power structures. While it is crucial to recognise it as an imperialist desire to conquer the post-Soviet state by Russian power elites, the role of global capital should not be disregarded. This marks an entry point to sketch out the impact of global capital on the wartime volunteers, which took a form of ubiquitous support of Ukrainian society, as by Western societies, so by the state. The media discourse on the “absurdity of war in 21st century”<sup>87</sup> in Europe has evolved, supported by visits of Western political elites to Ukraine since the 24<sup>th</sup> of February. Nevertheless, the question arises why Ukrainian resistance was that much supported when there are numerous military conflicts and humanitarian crises happening in other parts of the world?

One of the reasons that was brought out by Ukrainian scholar Olena Lyubchenko has indicated the systemic racism, rendering Ukrainians as ‘good Europeans’ that justifies the comprehensive allocation of Western capital to the war support while withdrawing from responsibility for the crises beyond Global North.<sup>88</sup> Even though it does not disregard Ukrainians’ collective emancipatory fight it unravels as an effort, initiated from above and entangled with capitalist and imperialist hierarchies. While the Ukrainian social reproduction system operates at the cost of households, EU countries benefit from Ukrainian migrants that are taken as a cheap labour force and frequently excluded from social benefits within the EU. Furthermore, the tight debt dependency of the Ukrainian state, despite being put on hold till the end of 2023<sup>89</sup>, opens up further neoliberalisation politics in a post-war reconstruction project.

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<sup>87</sup> Jon Henley and Julian Borger, “UN secretary general describes war in Ukraine as ‘absurdity’ in 21st century,” *The Guardian*, last modified 28 April 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/28/un-secretary-general-describes-war-in-ukraine-as-absurdity-in-21st-century>.

<sup>88</sup> Lyubchenko, “On the Frontier of Whiteness?”.

<sup>89</sup> “Campaign success: Cancel Ukraine’s debt,” *Debt Justice*, July 21, 2022, <https://debtjustice.org.uk/news/campaign-success-cancel-ukraines-debt>.

#### 4.b. Accumulation by mobilisation. Prytula Charity Fund

The volunteer movement in Ukraine expanded throughout the whole territory due to established knowledge and skills. What is crucial to pinpoint is that even though military conflict has been lasting for eight years, and the Armed Forces, as well as civilians were much more prepared, the state again demonstrated its incapability and reluctance to respond decently to the conflict. In the interview to *The Washington Post*, the president Zelenskiy claims:

*You can't simply say to me, "Listen, you should start to prepare people now and tell them they need to put away money, they need to store up food." If we had communicated that — and that is what some people wanted, who I will not name — then I would have been losing \$7 billion a month since last October, and at the moment when the Russians did attack, they would have taken us in three days. I'm not saying whose idea it was, but generally, our inner sense was right: If we sow chaos among people before the invasion, the Russians will devour us. Because during chaos, people flee the country.<sup>90</sup>*

This demonstrates that driven by extending economic earnings and capital accumulation, the Ukrainian state demonstrated ignorance towards the security and welfare of the society. What stands out is the vast rhetoric of heroisation of Zelenskiy and Ukrainian political elites, who 'stuck around'<sup>91</sup> despite the tremendous risks of capture. However, it is important to acknowledge that behind the 'patriotic' beliefs and longings for the victory the political intentions of sustained capital accumulation are being pursued. The repercussion of this is apparent in recurrent mobilisation of civilians to exercise the expected state functions.

Nevertheless, there were some state attempts to support civilian volunteerism. In August 2022 state introduced a novel policy of tax relief for registered volunteers that are affiliated with formal organisations or acting autonomously. The policy stipulates the absence of taxation on individual fundraising, health-related spendings, and participation of volunteers in educational and cultural events related to volunteerism.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Isabelle Khurshudyan, "An interview with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky," *The Washington Post*, 16 August 2022,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/08/16/zelensky-interview-transcript/>.

<sup>91</sup> Simon Shuster, "2022 Person of the year. Volodymyr Zelensky," *TIME* online, last modified December 7, 2022, <https://time.com/person-of-the-year-2022-volodymyr-zelensky/>.

<sup>92</sup> Svitlana Kucher, "Charity, volunteerism, and taxation aspects during wartime: what is new?" [Blahodiynist, volonterstvo i podatkovy aspekty v umovah viyny: shcho novoho?], *European Business*

On the one hand, this was initiated to facilitate volunteerism and support the volunteers and organisations they deliver the work within. In another instance, there were several discussions on corruption and fraud. As the legal base for volunteerism and charity activity is rather loose and full of gaps, there is a space for accusing volunteers of fraud and corruption, while camouflaging systemic corruption within political powers.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, I argue that volunteer movement is willing to rapidly deliver the needed aid due to its informal institutional status. Another interesting case of promulgating volunteerism is a state initiative 'Army of Reconstruction'. This project was introduced in the fall of 2022 as a mobilisation of civilians, who lost their jobs due to war, to contribute to the reconstruction of Ukraine through delivering community service usually in a form of physical work, such as fortifying checkpoints, preparing wood for the winter, cleaning ruined houses and unloading humanitarian aid at the points of delivery. As of April 2023, the Ministry of Economy declared that more than fourteen thousand unemployed Ukrainians were engaged and around 85 million hryvnya (more than 2 million euros) was compensated. However, what stays obscured is how the process is organised. While the guaranteed salary for this work is a minimum wage in Ukraine (around 170 euros), it is offered only to those, officially registered in the unemployment centres. The crucial moment here is that despite the state claiming it to be a voluntary activity, participation in 'Army of Reconstruction' presupposes expulsion from the unemployment centre and loss of the unemployment allowance for the worker.<sup>94</sup> This demonstrates similar tendencies of the Soviet regime, where civic engagement, was recognised as a 'voluntary-compulsory' activity. Hence, the project reveals exploitation of the individuals, robbed from any economic security.

One of the national representations of successful volunteerism is a case of Serhiy Prytula, who is well-known TV-host and actor, and former almost-to-be founder of the political party '24<sup>th</sup> of August'.<sup>95</sup> He dove into volunteerism since 2014 privately donating money to the Armed Forces and delivering necessary equipment to the frontline. Furthermore, he institutionalised his agency by registering a *Prytula charity fund* to officially mainly support Armed Forces, as well as that help internally displaced people with humanitarian aid. Applying his professionalised networks and skills in a form of publicity and acting, he gained much visibility and support from the society, as

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*Association*, January 13, 2023, <https://eba.com.ua/blagodijnist-volonterstvo-i-podatkovi-aspekty-v-umovah-vijny-shho-novogo/>.

<sup>93</sup> Marichka Ilyina, "State and volunteers are not competitors: what are the solutions for understanding?," *Tvoje Misto*, accessed 15 April 2022, [https://tvoemisto.tv/exclusive/volonter\\_pomichnyk\\_chy\\_shahray\\_yak\\_pidtrymuvaty\\_viyskovyh\\_zakon\\_no\\_137319.html](https://tvoemisto.tv/exclusive/volonter_pomichnyk_chy_shahray_yak_pidtrymuvaty_viyskovyh_zakon_no_137319.html).

<sup>94</sup> Robert Vasyl, "Ukraine has opened second front line: where does 'Army of Reconstruction' plan to advance," *Apostrophe*, November 18, 2022, <https://apostrophe.ua/ua/article/society/2022-11-18/ukraina-otkryila-vtoroy-front-kuda-poydet-nastupat-armiya-vosstanovleniya/49052>

<sup>95</sup> Roman Kravets, "Serhiy Prytula: we will continue fighting, while Russians will be dropping dead on our land," *Ukrayinska Pravda*, May 12, 2022, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2022/05/12/7345753/>.

well as from the state since 2022. What is crucial here to acknowledge, is the interconnectedness of professional fields of media among current political elites of Ukraine and Prytula as an individual. The methods of Prytula's volunteerism are mostly characterised by fundraising, where by calling out to the households and local businesses, he acquires necessary financial support. As he claims: *"If I need to purchase for our battalions some expensive drones, I could just ask people and they can send me half a million euros within six hours"*.<sup>96</sup> His methods of fundraising are visible through his eloquent emotional rhetoric, such as 'donations for revenge', where Prytula and a famous Ukrainian radical right activist Serhiy Sternenko announced their campaign *"You made Ukrainians mad"*.<sup>97</sup>



**Figure 4.** The fundraising campaign *"People's Bayraktar"* are already in use in Ukraine". Source: Prytula Charity Foundation, 19.01.2023.

In general, the success of Prytula's campaigns is inconceivable; within several days he collects millions of hryvnias for his goals. However, according to the data provided by the fund, almost 90% of donations consisted of small amounts of money, ranging

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<sup>96</sup> "For 8 years of volunteerism for ATO (Ukrainian Anti-Terrorist Operation) I collected less funds than I collect now within 2 days - Prytula," *Radio Svoboda*, June 23, 2022, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-prytula-volonter/31912223.html>.

<sup>97</sup> Daria Bazalynska, "You made Ukrainians mad: fundraising for revenge," *JetSetter*, October 10, 2022, <https://jetsetter.ua/vy-rozlyutyly-ukrayintsiv-sergij-prytula-ogolosyv-zbir-na-pomstu/>.



from 1 cent to 25 euros from a big share of people.<sup>98</sup> This serves as evidence that while households are struggling with their own financial well-being, they are expected to donate money to sustain the army. Highlighted by Jennifer Mathers, the effect of ‘crowdfunding the war’ serves at best the Ukrainian government, considering that the defence sector obtains the largest share of the state budget.<sup>99</sup> Another aspect I would like to pinpoint is the how the dominant representation of volunteerism in Ukraine is being constructed. While Prytula’s positionality of white cis-gender male reflects the prevailing power structures of the society, the high visibility of status and recognition of his agency mutes those, who do not fit into the discourses of power. Even though the scope of this research is focused on volunteerism, enacted through physical work that mostly does not require prior experience, it is crucial to trace the case of Prytula success as within media, so for the donors in order to highlight how power reproduces itself through silencing other voices.

#### **4.c. Survival through the (un)fittest. Volunteerism territorial configurations**

While the heterogeneous volunteer movement encountered a phase of partial institutionalisation, it is still very diverse and in the making. Nevertheless, after a thorough analysis of the profile of engaged volunteers since the unravelling of a full-scale invasion, three categories have been identified. Here, it is crucial to flesh out their motifs of volunteerism and socio-economic situation that will contribute to a broader understanding of volunteerism agencies. As already indicated, women are better represented within volunteerism due to the gender expectations, as well as the effects of socio-economic circumstances, consequently, my specific focus lies on unpacking several categories of women volunteers, engaged in the work.

While a big share of volunteerism is happening on the ground within Ukrainian territory, a part of it happens beyond it, mostly in European countries. At the early stages local residents, non-Ukrainian volunteers were involved quite actively, driven by empathic endeavours, as well as time and financial resources to engage. Some of them were representatives of Western NGOs, there were also students, gaining experience and linguistic practice from volunteerism.<sup>100</sup> However, the long-term volunteer labour was delivered by Ukrainians, whether pre-war migrants or war refugees (first category). While Ukrainian labour migrants sustain EU economies already for years, it is essential to acknowledge precarious socio-economic status due to employment in low-paid

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<sup>98</sup> Lyubov Petrushko, “Almost half of the fundraiser was covered by less than 25 euros donations. ‘Prytula Charity Fund’ shared how people were donating for drones,” *Forbes*, July 5, 2022, <https://forbes.ua/news/kozhna-kopiyka-mae-znachennya-mayzhe-polovinu-zboru-narodniy-bayraktar-zabespechili-vneski-do-1000-grn-u-fondi-prituli-rozkazali-yak-lyudi-skidivalis-na-bayraktari-05072022-6997>.

<sup>99</sup> Mathers, “Women, war and austerity,” 1248.

<sup>100</sup> Daria Krivonos, “Who stands with Ukraine in the long term? On the invisible labour of Ukrainian migrant communities,” *LeftEast*, July 6, 2022, <https://lefteast.org/who-stands-with-ukraine/>.

sectors of the European economy.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, the work conditions and availability of migrant's time determined their capacity to engage into volunteer labour. As was mentioned by a Ukrainian feminist scholar Oksana Dutchak in a personal interview, the trade union of Ukrainian care workers joined voluntary work very actively at the beginning. Later some of the workers due to work specifics and attachment to work place, like in caring for elderly, could not pursue volunteers. In contrast, one of the workers, who babysits toddlers, was actively engaged in volunteerism and even encouraged by an employee to do so.<sup>102</sup>

Since the Russian invasion in Ukraine more than 8 million Ukrainians fled abroad, seeking for safety.<sup>103</sup> The majority of them are women due to the restriction of border-crossing for men, imposed by martial law in Ukraine.<sup>104</sup> While volunteerism abroad by locals and foreign activists was glorified and highly recognised, the labour of Ukrainians was perceived as non-work, a natural mobilisation of people 'coming from Ukraine'.<sup>105</sup> Due to the availability of linguistic skills, Ukrainians were not acquiring any material or symbolic gains for this work, that was also exacerbated whether by their precarious condition as employees, or vulnerability due to the displacement.

While Ukrainian women refugees facing gaps in care provision at the countries of arrival, they mostly deliver it by themselves or through informal networks, which are composed of Ukrainian refugees themselves. As austerity policies affect social reproduction all around Europe, they affect not only local women but specifically having negative impacts on migrants due to displacement, search for paid labour and other social welfare support.<sup>106</sup> What stands out is the paradox, elaborated by Oksana Dutchak that explains the correlation between class privilege and integration into informal network of care. These women, who due to their socio-economic status were capable of getting a separate apartment and absence of need in social payments, found themselves isolated from informal care networks, in contrast to those, who settled in refugee camps and are regular visitors of social institutions.<sup>107</sup>

Despite the significant impact of volunteerism by Ukrainian women refugees, here I strongly turn towards Ukrainian women, whose life is pursued within Ukrainian territorial borders, thus highly influenced by the processes within. I argue that volunteerism movement is comprised of civic activists, who priorly engaged in the civic

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Oksana Dutchak, interview with an author, March 13, 2023.

<sup>103</sup> "Refugees from Ukraine recorded across Europe," *UNHCR, Government*, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>, (accessed 11 April 2023).

<sup>104</sup> Oksana Dutchak, "Together We Stand: Enforced Single Motherhood and Ukrainian Refugees' Care Networks," *LeftEast*, last modified January 19, 2023, <https://lefteast.org/enforced-single-motherhood-and-ukrainian-refugees-care-networks/>.

<sup>105</sup> Krivonos, «Who stands with Ukraine in the long term?».

<sup>106</sup> Dutchak, "Together We Stand".

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

engagement (second category), as well as women, who mobilised due to faced socio-economic circumstances (third category). As their voluntary commitment does not carry any political interests and mostly serves as a reactionary response to help, they are manifested through non-politicised engagement. In order to scrutinize the lived realities of volunteers-activists, as well as their non-politicised colleagues I turn towards the analysis of the selected case study *Marsh Zhinok*, a feminist initiative, which since the full-scale Russian invasion reoriented their activism towards support of women in need. Before the full-scale invasion, *Marsh Zhinok* was known for organising Women's Marches to address the existing gendered problems in Ukrainian society. After the 24<sup>th</sup> of February *Marsh Zhinok* registered as a charity organisation to do volunteer work and help the most vulnerable groups of people. As their main focus is the provision of humanitarian aid voluntary work, I aim to examine how their work is organised and exercised on the ground.

## 5. Marsh Zhinok: case study

*Strolling through the neighbourhood in downtown of Kyiv, we find ourselves in between historic buildings and cultural venues, evoking a vibrant atmosphere around. We pass one of the oldest Ukrainian meccas of knowledge that enlightened the most prominent philosophers, scientists and scholars of the last several centuries. Over there, on the top of a hill a baroque masterpiece, Saint Andrews Cathedral overlooks the city, enchanting with its five dark turquoise domes. Right at the bottom of the hill, we turn towards the cobblestone tiny street. It looks quiet and slightly neglected. Several dilapidated buildings that have little historical heritage boards on them are awaiting to be demolished by hungry private developers. Keep walking through the street, we stumble upon a recently renovated house that stands out as a landmark of the street. Getting closer, we are welcomed with a gate and a doorbell to ring. Try once, try twice, and after a long pause, the bzzz sound signals that we are welcome to enter. Here we are, at the yard, constituted by an assemblage of objects and spaces. Plastic grass on the concrete floor, cute kitten poster on the wooden gate doors, power generator and mobile toilets serve as a reminder of uplifting moods and readiness for unpredictable blackouts and shellings. On the right, endless blocks of pressed and packed canned food, cereals, and shampoos are ready to be carried inside.*



**Figure 5.** Corridor of Marsh Zhinok hub.  
Photo taken by author.

*We meet Lena, a woman in her thirties, carrying a palette of canned food from the storage to the main building. Lena is a mastermind of the storage, laying out the goods and collecting the boxes for packing. Once, everything is done in the storage, Lena goes to her office space to post a thank-you Instagram message for the donations provided. We enter the building, a long narrow corridor, filled with boxes, serving as an obstacle to move forward. On the left, there is a kitchen, where laughter stretches across the room. The tiny space is filled with kitchen utensils, cookies and drinks to energise everybody who came here to work. On the wall there is a rainbow-coloured rule list, reminding that this is a safe space, that's why it is crucial to respect and take care of the space and each other. Here is Veronika, claiming that there is no time for her to check the morning news. While sipping her coffee, she is calling the post office, counting the applications, and ordering more soaps. She switches between*

*Russian and Ukrainian, sharing a couple of stories from her hometown Kharkiv. Her partner Vitalik is also there. Once Veronika left the room, he shares how their daughter is always upset that it is him, and not the mom, who picks her up from kindergarten. Here enters Natalia, a young smiley woman, carrying the printed papers with personalised requests for aid from women. She says today is a 'jackpot', almost 200 requests. Suddenly an audio message speaks from her phone. It is her sister, asking to pass a message to Joe Biden, who happens to be in Kyiv today: "Dear, if you going to walk somewhere there in the centre and see uncle Biden, can you tell him that there are two girls Natalya and Ira, who would really like to have a little house, as theirs was heavily bombed in Irpin? Tell him that we would be so-so happy."*



**Figure 6.** Humanitarian aid packing room in Marsh Zhinok. Photo taken by author.

*We move further, passing a tiny room, where pink-haired Masha unstoppably registers the parcels to be sent to Eastern Ukraine. The high towers of parcels make Masha small and almost unnoticeable. Suddenly, we hear the rasping sound of the tape, signalling that the work is in full swing. There are Roma and Eric, deftly preparing the boxes to be packed. Here comes Anya, a young student with the cat-ears on her head. Balancing in between her remote lectures broadcasted in Zoom, she starts collecting the needed items for parcels. The space is being filled in with action, barely anyone talks. There are some waves of laughter, once in a while, questions on how many boxes should be packed today. But mostly just silence, and then just the cutting sound of tape and plastic bags from cereals and sweets that soon to be travel to a five-children household or a pensioner, yet residing in a small town in the East. The volunteer-body is bent, functioning like a robot, without the need for a break. They are not stopping, aiming to be at their best efficiency. Suddenly, the postal truck arrives to pick up the parcels, making everybody run outside to the yard. They shape a "stream" - a row of people, close to each other - from the main building all the way to the truck to make the box-passing process quicker and easier. Taking half an hour to load around 300 boxes, the truck leaves and everybody goes back to the choreography of the packing 'routine'.*



accompanied by supportive partnerships with the Russian feminist movement.<sup>111</sup> However, for many it changed since the escalation of the war in February 2022 that entailed reorganisation of their activism towards the support of Ukrainian women, who suffered the consequences of war the most. Identification of the most vulnerable groups of aid recipients is based on the socio-economic status of women, such as older women, women with disabilities, single mothers with children and pregnant women, as well as geographic proximity to frontlines, the victims of which, are internally displaced women and women in recently de-occupied areas. Thus, the territorial scope of aid provision is concentrated mostly on small towns of Ukraine, as well as rural areas due to a lack of access to basic products there.

***Only small towns and villages. The administrative centres of the regions are not considered, as it shows that in big cities you buy anything for quite decent prices, but in small towns and villages, whether there is nothing or super expensive due to logistics reasons. And this is risky for sellers and for truck drivers.***

*Lena*

What is crucial here to note, is how aid is being distributed spatially. As pointed out by Neil Smith: “Urban space is capitalised as an absolute space of production”.<sup>112</sup> While volunteer participation in Ukraine happens at the urban scale, the majority of recipients of aid are represented by internally displaced individuals, who ended up residing in big cities. In a conversation with feminists, who engaged in humanitarian aid, they highlighted that the lion’s share of the international or state support initially is provided to Kyiv-based organisations. Afterwards, it is redirected either to other big municipalities or to the most visible charity organisations in those cities, which tends to be resold or stolen for private needs. Furthermore, large humanitarian funds oftentimes do not acknowledge the needs of vulnerable groups of society. Considered insignificant in capitalist terms, accompanied by a shortage of labour force and problematic logistics, the hinterlands of the state are commonly staying beyond the support.

The form of help provided by *Marsh Zhinok* is divided into three directions: provision of temporary shelters, psychological aid and humanitarian aid. I will sketch out all three forms of aid with a specific focus on humanitarian aid that covers basic existence needs, serves as a temporary substitute for social welfare support, and requires minimum skills to perform it.

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<sup>111</sup> Kateryna Semchuk, “Right to resist: How war changed Ukraine’s feminist movement,” *Open Democracy*, last modified February 23, 2023, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/war-with-russia-changed-ukraine-feminist-movement>.

<sup>112</sup> Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (University of Georgia Press, 1990), 181.

## 5.b. Psychological aid provision

Recognition of the extreme vulnerability of women during the military conflict and the urgency of immediate psychological support entailed the emergence of crisis counselling that served as a form of psychological aid. Organised through digital means of communication, the support was available to any woman who had access to the internet connection.

***In the beginning, we created a Telegram chatbot for women psychologists and ones in need of help. And everybody was joining, so many people as it was mostly online. But then it got clear that it was not really the right way to do it, as there were not only professional psychologists, but also ones, who beforehand took two-day psychology courses. And then these 'experts' were saying to people: "Come on, pull yourself together, there are people dying over there, while you are whining." So, there was a selection: you needed to show your diploma and education. But if in the beginning psychologists provided aid voluntarily, now we need to pay them. It's difficult to provide help for free for one year. Of course, it's not the whole fee, there is a big discount. While women in need of counselling are getting it for free, 'Marsh Zhinok' helps financially to psychologists.***

Lena

A close look at the organisation of psychological aid demonstrates the peculiarity of this form of volunteer work. While at the beginning anyone was welcome to come aboard, then within the time the availability of professionalised skills turned out to be the filtering mechanism for volunteers. According to Arlene Daniels, the recognition of labour is based on the required skills and education, thus entails remuneration for it.<sup>113</sup> Though the psychological aid within *Marsh Zhinok* is delivered by women due to the ideological premises of the organisation, this work was recognised as an "unwaged extension of the paid labour market"<sup>114</sup>, thus eventually converted into financially remunerated practice. One of the volunteers of psychological aid provision in *Marsh Zhinok* shared her personal experience of commitment.

***It started at the beginning of March [2022]. When I started feeling the ground again after the first week of the full-scale invasion. And then I started searching for where I could help as a psychologist. In the beginning, I was myself feeling not very well, swinging in between moods. But then I realised I must do something. And my friend told me she has a friend, who joined the crisis counselling hotline. Back then they were working already for several weeks. This was the beginning, all of us did not have much experience back then.***

Lucy [name changed due to an NDA]

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<sup>113</sup> Daniels, "Invisible Work," 408.

<sup>114</sup> Cora Baldock, "Feminist discourses of unwaged work: The case of volunteerism," *Australian Feminist Studies* 13, no. 27 (1998): 19.



Taking a closer look at the pathway of respondents' engagement, it becomes evident that being useful in times of crisis served as a driving force for mobilisation. Not having any prior volunteer experience, she used a friendship network to be recruited into volunteerism. This serves as evidence of the argument by Natalia Stepaniuk, highlighting that "strong private ties underpinned the formation of voluntary networks"<sup>115</sup>, which, as noted above, is an outcome of a weak civil society. Moreover, the informant indicated what role did this engagement play in times of crisis.

***It was not important whether it was voluntary work or not. It was important to help somebody. Back then, it worked as a distraction. And when we were working back then, it was like having a rest from what was going on with us. And while doing it, I could be distracted from myself and start thinking.***

*Lucy [name changed due to an NDA]*

While the provision of psychological aid unravels as a form of affective and intellectual labour, it simultaneously plays out as a practice of rest, of retreat from the devastating reality. Here, I argue that voluntary work in crisis carries a paradoxical nature. While on the one hand, it serves as a caring activity of volunteers towards the recipients of psychological aid, on the other hand, it plays out as a volunteer's tool for caring for themselves. Thus, it unfolds as a coping mechanism in crisis circumstances that I will address further.

### **5.c. Temporary shelters**

In the beginning, on the third day of the full-scale invasion, *Marsh Zhinok* organised a shelter in Lviv, a city in Western Ukraine that served as a transit point for civilians, fleeing the country. For the first month, the shelter was made in the headquarters of the initiative which over time became highly problematic. As the *Marsh Zhinok* immediately committed to humanitarian aid, the building was full of food packages, and hygiene items, as well as not designed for residential purposes. The absence of facilities, like sleeping places and showers was meant to be a temporary stop for displaced women before leaving abroad. After a month *Marsh Zhinok* discovered a hostel that was repurposed for temporary shelter needs. One room served as an accommodation for the LGBTQ+ community, mostly transgenders and LB individuals, while another room was allotted to women with children. Eventually, the shelter in Lviv was moved to a spacious house that geographically was distanced from the city centre but was much more convenient for residing long-term. This new place was a private house that was rented specifically for shelter purposes. Due to a prior function of the building as a residential space, the house was equipped with all the necessary facilities, such as a shower, kitchen and beds. This contributed to designing a home-like environment for the residents, despite the temporary nature of shelters.

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<sup>115</sup> Stepaniuk, "Wartime Civilian Mobilization," 11.

Another shelter was opened in Chernivtsi that before this served as an open-office space that lacked any necessary living facilities. While at the beginning people were accommodated on sleeping mats, gradually they started adjusting the spaces with wooden pallets, and eventually beds and showers. There is another shelter in Zhytomyr, as well as the plan is to open one in Kyiv for internally displaced women, who suffered from domestic violence. In this way, the voluntary work evolves into self-organised actions, directed towards the adaptation of spaces to urgent needs. Furthermore, initially carrying a reactionary and temporary intention of adaptation, the spaces are modified towards long-term use due to acute uncertainty of the crisis resolution.

The general account demonstrates that the provision of shelters serves as a hands-on approach that has a vital role in temporary housing organisation. Despite that, it is crucial to address how volunteerism is organised there. In a conversation with a Ukrainian feminist Oksana Dutchak, she shared a story about another feminist organisation *Zhinochi Perspektyvy* [Women's Perspectives] that follows a similar agency path as *Marsh Zhinok*.

***There is an organisation «Zhinochi Perspektyvy» in Lviv, one of the oldest feminist organisations, which works since the 1990s. And before full-scale invasion, they had two shelters for women, who suffered from domestic violence. And now they have much more shelters. They accommodate displaced women, mostly with difficult life circumstances, with disabilities. And photo reports show that they actively engage displaced women in volunteer work. And it is rather interesting how voluntary this is. And for sure, they are not forcing the women to participate, but whether it is perceived as duty, and not really as volunteering. Like, as we live in this shelter, we need to participate.***

*Oksana Dutchak, a feminist researcher*

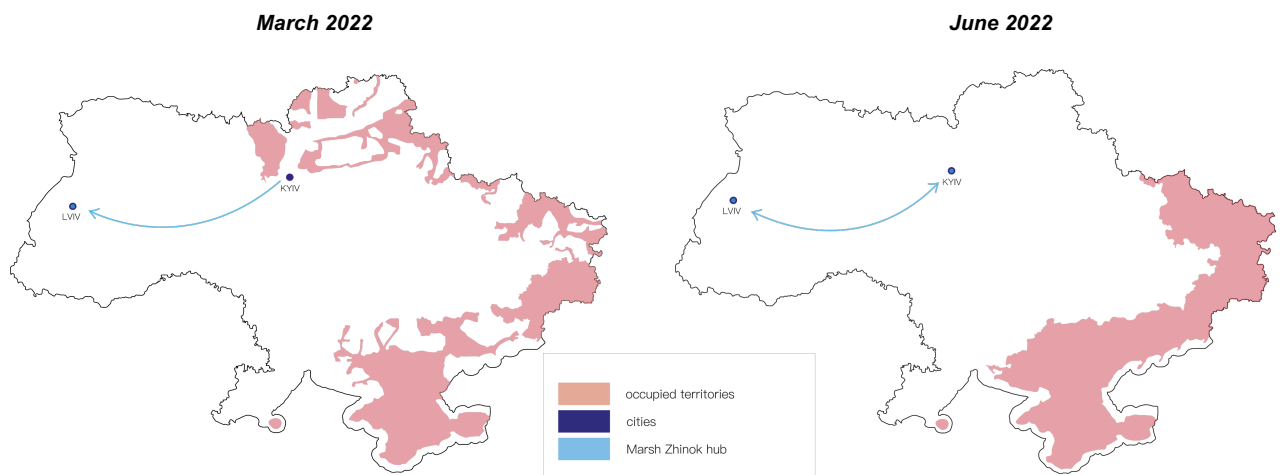
What opens up here is the complex bundle of relations and hierarchies that reveals through participation patterns. The initial vulnerability of displaced women transformed into a privileged position in relation to those who did not flee. These women are mostly non-politicised actors, who if not displaced, would fight for their survival. However, the opportunity of shelter as a form of help produces circumstances where women might feel obliged to participate. I will examine this further in the following section.

Another crucial aspect of voluntary work in temporary shelters is the face-to-face communication that requires a profound devotion, not only in terms of physical, but mostly affective labour. The victims, who faced several forms of violence, as due to military conflict, as within the household, require peculiar support and attention. In the next section, I examine how humanitarian aid volunteerism is organised in *Marsh Zhinok* and the effect of external factors on the possibility to perform this work.

## 5.d. Humanitarian aid

At the beginning of the full-scale invasion, shock and panic spread throughout the whole state. People who priorly were not affected by military and humanitarian consequences were striving to find spaces of possible safety across the state. Thus, majorly urban areas in Western Ukraine served as settling areas that had a profound impact on the spatial dimension of volunteerism. It turned apparent that the movement of volunteerism was affected by the spatial dynamics of the frontlines. In light of the occupation of the Kyiv region for several months the geography of volunteerism was modified accordingly.

The key segment of voluntary work, performed at *Marsh Zhinok* is the provision of humanitarian aid. In March 2022 *Marsh Zhinok* deployed its agency in Lviv, which back then was perceived as the transit city of Ukraine, as well the safest one due to its proximity to the EU border. Making an official registration as a charity organisation, the initiative began employing already existing networks and financial resources in order to help those in need. Once, the most shocking phase of war passed, *Marsh Zhinok* came back to Kyiv and opened a humanitarian hub in their office building, which functions as one till nowadays. This demonstrated how spatially volunteerism was adjusting to crises.



**Figure 8.** Map of the territorial changes of Marsh Zhinok headquarters. Source: UAWarData. Prepared by author.

***I noticed that in the beginning everyone was engaged and it was really difficult to find some place to volunteer. Moreover, we left Kyiv and moved to Western Ukraine, and there everyone wanted to help. And it was difficult to squeeze in somewhere. You needed to have some connections, needed that someone would recommend you in order to start volunteering.***

*Lena*

In regards to the volunteer hub in Lviv, it was mentioned that in the fall of 2022 any humanitarian aid agency was abandoned and the place was transformed into a community centre for displaced women. Thus, volunteerism reveals an adaptive character that is demonstrated in organisation patterns. The informality of the movement permits various adjustments that are affected by multiple factors, such as the proximity of the frontline, the capacity of social capital to engage, availability of material resources to perform the work. In the next section, I would like to zoom in on the voluntary practices to trace how the work is being redistributed throughout the organisation and address the larger change of the organisation's agency.

### **5.d.i. 'Invisible' practices**

Volunteerism practices within the provision of humanitarian aid in *Marsh Zhinok* are highly diverse and here I distinguish three categories of practices according to acquired skills and resources to perform it. The first type of practice unfolds as one that enables volunteerism and activism within *Marsh Zhinok* in the first place. This encompasses fundraising, communication with recipients of their needs, logistics, public and legal affairs. Involvement of numerous stakeholders, such as donors, municipalities, local communities in need, as well as post offices and media entities rely on professional skills and competence to deliver this work. In *Marsh Zhinok* this form of work is allocated to the initial activists of the organisation, feminists, who due to prior familiarity with the processes are willing to perform this work. As for most of them, activism in *Marsh Zhinok* functions as the major project of their life, their work is commonly remunerated and is officially incorporated into grant budgets. However, as was mentioned in a collective discussion with other feminist initiatives, the allocated wages are directed towards a small share of activists which means that the general unpaid workload is increased.

The second type of practices are the numerous activities that are required within the organisation to perform specifically humanitarian aid. This work consisted of maintenance of the space, handling applications, purchasing of materials and goods for packing, as well coordination of volunteers recruited for packing. Actors of this form of volunteerism are a mixed group of individuals, partially comprised of activists of *Marsh Zhinok* and *Insight*, as well as recently recruited volunteers, commonly internally displaced women, that demonstrated their capacity to handle responsibility and availability of time to engage in a long-term.

***As I have proven my responsibility, people know this and delegate a certain part of the work. The same with Natalya. She was coming here for three months, and I realised I can trust her.***

*Veronika*

The third group of practices is characterised by physical labour that does not require any prior experience. This consisted of making a box, filling it in with the goods and

delivering it to a room for further transportation. As there are no prior skills or knowledge needed, these practices are mostly exercised by non-politicised volunteers, particularly internally displaced women and local students, who were not engaged in volunteerism beforehand. The line between second and third practices is sometimes blurred. This correlates with a period of engagement and willingness to take long-term responsibility. Individuals who sporadically join to help are commonly performing the third group of practices.

***I'm coming here not every day, so it's not turning into a boring routine. Moreover, I have courses and am studying at the university. That's why I can't devote my time here every day. But twice-three times a week, I come.***

Anya

Precise scrutiny of the abovementioned practices develops the relationship between the socio-economic status and political interests of the volunteers and the voluntary work they are engaged in. As noted above, the voluntary work in *Marsh Zhinok* humanitarian aid hub is split into three segments, ranging from professional work to organisation and physical labour, requiring the least intellectual effort. The first group of practices requires peculiar knowledge and understanding of the organisational structure, public communication, and financial sustainability of NGOs, consequently, it is performed purely by feminists, who priorly engaged in the agency of initiative. The second group of practices is based on the capability to perform it in the long term, thus requiring responsibility and full-time commitment. Composed of organisational, as well physical practices, this work is shared among activists, who within time pass the knowledge to the most active novel volunteers. The third group is merely the physical labour of packing the boxes and is mostly relegated to non-politicised volunteers. It is evident how hierarchical labour distribution is exercised within *Marsh Zhinok*. While intellectually-demanding work was prioritised to those with experience and knowledge, the physical labour is transferred to the socio-economically vulnerable individuals.

What also opens up is how the organisation generally reorganised its activity. Like the majority of feminist organisations, *Marsh Zhinok* switched from conventional political activism to the provision of immediate aid. This was explained by the proximity of external crisis (Russian aggression), as well as national wartime restrictions on the discussion of local political issues. Though, taking a critical stance towards gender roles and division of labour, they employ volunteerism as a temporary tactic to pursue their agency. As claimed by activist Alisa Shampanska from a Kyiv-based feminist organisation *FemSolution*: “Activism can't be reduced only to street actions and placards. It was always about education and working with an audience, [...] You have to act based on the situation.”<sup>116</sup> Supporting solely vulnerable groups of women, the feminist movement, including *Marsh Zhinok* readapt their activism according to imposed circumstances. Though the first year of the full-scale invasion demanded

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<sup>116</sup> Semchuk, “Right to resist.”

merely reactionary work and immediate outcomes, it turns apparent that over time the feeling of opening up a critical discussion revives. Nevertheless, it is vital to address what are the motivations of volunteers' engagement to reveal how 'one's own will' is exercised.

#### **5.d.ii. Motivations**

***When the war started, I knew I need to help my country. I knew I could not stand aside, but I could not join the military forces, as I have a child. [...] There was a choice to help the Armed Forces, but I feel like everybody is helping them. And this is cool, maybe there should be even more help, but they are getting it. But the women during the war are suffering. As I myself was suffering. That's why I realised that if not military aid, then aid to women.***

*Veronika*

While all of the volunteers mentioned contribution to collective good, to the country's better future, additional motivations were distinguished according to what practices they were performing. While *Marsh Zhinok* activists are devoted to volunteerism due to their political stance of addressing women's needs that were redirected towards the support of the most vulnerable in military and humanitarian crises, for most of them agency of *Marsh Zhinok* is the main source of income. Thus, even though the organisational team is still delivering charity work, their work is having financial remuneration, officially ascribed within grant applications. Activists themselves do not recognise themselves as volunteers and perceive their work as an extension of their activism towards supporting women in urgent need.



**Figure 9.** Process of volunteer work at Marsh Zhinok. Photo by Elena Kraynova.

However, it is crucial to trace what propels the engagement of volunteers within two other categories. Besides common claims of being beneficial to society and contributing to the common good, there were various motivations mentioned.

***Firstly, I lost my job. Secondly, I started feeling mentally safer here and did not think about war, about my problems outside of the hub. Here I forget about everything. And of course, what we're doing in the first place is helping women, and people in difficult times. I also really like our team spirit here; we are like family.***

Natalya

***For me it is also a contribution to the stability of my country. Even though, I am not in Ukraine right now. This is my contribution to support my people. I feel attached to the society.***

Lucy [name changed due to an NDA]

It turns evident that while the major motivation is to help the society and the state that in a case of military invasion entails the victory of Ukraine, there are additional factors that presuppose volunteers' engagement. Firstly, the loss of a job provided the time to engage in volunteerism. However, the availability of time was limited by the economic security of volunteers.

***And now I'm sustaining myself through the money I earned in the good times, I was once paid quite well. But it's already time to search for a job, as volunteering is cool, but it is still just volunteering.***

Natalya

As voluntary work does not presuppose material remuneration, it becomes clear that commitment to voluntary work on a regular basis is enacted by those, who to a certain degree economically sufficient and could sustain themselves for a certain period of time. Another volunteer Veronika combines her voluntary work, with paid work as a social pedagogue in school and reproductive labour, while bringing up her toddler. The capacity to work remotely, as well as having a partner who takes a share of responsibilities within a household, facilitates Veronika's commitment to volunteerism. Additionally, student volunteers noted that the termination of their remote studies reduced their availability for volunteer participation.

***I could say in the beginning I just felt like I need to place myself somewhere not to feel useless in the 'universe' of Ukraine. That's why there was a need to do something for the victory and I am not really a good soldier, more like something social, humanitarian. Thus, I arrived here to occupy myself with something. Let's be honest, I don't want to save the world, I want to save myself first.***

Lena

Another crucial element that was highlighted is voluntary work as a distraction, as a way to retreat from the crisis and immerse yourself in voluntary work. As for the respondents, so for myself, volunteerism developed into an island of certainty, where daily monotonous actions play out as a tactic of emotional security. This emancipatory feature of voluntary work reveals that there is a part of life that is willing to be controlled. As noted above, the current situation of a military crisis in Ukraine that reinforced the economic and social reproduction crisis across the whole state has a profound impact on Ukrainian women. Accompanied by exacerbated precarity, instability and vulnerability as omnipresent features of contemporary life<sup>117</sup>, those women carve the spaces of certainty and security, while performing their voluntary routines. Thus, for volunteers the performed work stands as a way of caring for oneself while caring for others.



**Figure 10.** ‘Stream’ of volunteers loading up the car. Photo by Elena Kraynova.

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<sup>117</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Contre-feux: Propos pour servir à la résistance contre l’invasion néo-libérale* (Paris: Liber, 1998), 95-101.



***The first days it was really scary, I didn't have that many resources. But now volunteering helps me to gain energy from communication with people, and exchange of news.***

*Anya*

The collective attribute of voluntary work has also played a crucial role. References to prevailing community spirit and family-like atmosphere contribute to a general feeling of safety. Though verbal communication has not been much present within the space, the collective action for the same cause played a crucial role here. However, the nature of communal spirit has its peculiarities within *Marsh Zhinok*, as volunteerism shaped a space of encounter for groups of people that were priorly not engaging with each other. Shared among the LGBTQ+ community and non-politicised women, it is crucial to trace how this plays out within a space. According to the safety policy of feminist organisations, the recruitment of volunteers happens on the basis of gender identification, thus predominantly women are mobilised. Nevertheless, the presence of LGBTQ+ activists and men related to priorly engaged women volunteers turned evident.

***We have boys from the LGBTQ+ community, and we have heterosexual boys, but the latter are the ones we know. We were introducing them to women volunteers at Marsh Zhinok and asked whether it is comfortable for them to work with this person. If it was not, then we must have said no. Because heterosexual men here are mostly our friends, and we know that they want to help, that is why they are on the same page with us.***

*Veronika*

What is also crucial here to acknowledge is the blurring of the lines between gender identities and sexualities. As mentioned by participants, the key focus of volunteerism here is collective work.

***Ones, who want to volunteer and help people are coming here. That's why we never divide them into categories. For instance, I never ask a person, who is coming, whether she is a feminist or LGBTQ+ person. People are coming here to do something together. Helping people, devoting their spirit and physical labour.***

*Natalya*

This demonstrates the emergence of space of mutual recognition not through the social status of individuals, but through the labour, they are willing to perform together. Firstly, most of the non-politicised women volunteers were not priorly engaged in feminist activism, as well as were rather distanced from the structural gender inequalities. Veronika, an internally displaced woman from Kharkiv says that she has always been a feminist, but her partner, who has also engaged in the work in *Marsh Zhinok*, went through some drastic transformations.

***It was hard to name my husband a feminist. He was not homophobic but was very distanced from all of this. And now he really enjoys talking to the boys here, completely changed his opinion, and I feel it is like a victory, a small one, for our family.***

*Veronika*

This shows that voluntary work opened up the space of encounter for people with diverse political values, which had a transformative impact on those who had certain prejudices or ignorance towards structural inequalities.



**Figure 11.** Marsh Zhinok team. Photo by Elena Kraynova

The emphasis on physical labour plays a crucial role here. As volunteerism is mostly constituted by daily acts of physical labour it is vital what this form of work signifies for volunteers. My personal engagement in physical acts of volunteer work demonstrated how exhaustion and empowerment intersect with each other in one act. While for some it served as an opportunity to rest,

***I can't really sleep properly these months. I'm coming here, getting really physically devastated. And after I manage to fall asleep, as I feel so tired.***

*Mary [name changed due to an NDA]*

for others, it was a privileged deliberate choice due to the exhaustion from knowledge-based labour.

***I want some silly monotonous work, where I would have a minimum of responsibility. Before the war, I was a film director, and there was an absolutely different way of working. But here is monotonous, difficult work.***

*Lena*

The withdrawal from responsibility through switching to physical work demonstrates a coping mechanism from demanding-to-be productive reality. Though physical volunteerism also demands to be productive and efficient, it serves as an act of standing out against the responsabilisation of individuals to a certain degree.

All in all, the major motivation for the volunteer commitment was based on a will to personally contribute to the collective good of the state. The moral duty factor plays a crucial role here, as the government's success to place responsibility for the victory on the shoulders of the citizens is apparent. Nevertheless, the socio-economic circumstances of the volunteers have also stipulated their engagement. The unemployment, flexible and remote part-time work, as well as fragmented studying conditions, made it possible to allocate time for volunteerism. Furthermore, voluntary work offered a 'safe island' in times of acute uncertainty and precarity. A collective practice of volunteerism constituted a space of mutual recognition and interdependency, where the identity markers were placed in the background, and the work itself served as a signifier of recognition. This collective continuous process served as a point of encounter for two groups of volunteers - non-politicised citizens and feminist activists, affecting each other and carrying a transformative impact on prevalent prejudices towards queer and feminist struggles within Ukrainian society.

### ***5.d.iii. Recognition***

Laying at the intersection of feminist political activism and civilian volunteerism, the agency of *Marsh Zhinok* plays out on different scales of visibility. Highly present within the feminist movement, the initiative obtains more visibility through

collaborations with public personas and active promotion of their agency through social media channels. However, throughout the volunteerism movement, it stands still rather muted. Some of the volunteers compared *Marsh Zhinok* to *Prytula Charity Foundation* which revealed the relations between those two organisations.

***Because Prytula's Fund, by the way, don't mention it in front of Anastasiya [manager of the organisation], as she doesn't like him that much. He makes big things, something very grandeur, but we make small things, but really a lot of them.***

*Natalya*

This demonstrates the power dynamics within the volunteer movement of Ukraine. While the *Prytula Charity Fund* works on a larger scale, acquiring the majority of financial support and visibility, the smaller organisations similar to *Marsh Zhinok* tend to be silenced. What is crucial here, is that the priority of quality over quantity in the provision of aid, as well as responsiveness to the specific needs of aid recipients, creates an additional value to the aid performed in small women-led organisations. Furthermore, the overlay of the leftist political agenda of *Marsh Zhinok* reinforces their invisible contributions on a national scale.

***We are not collaborating with Prytula, even though we wanted to, tried to do this. But something went wrong. I know him personally; we collaborated a lot at my previous work. But he has too many requests, and we are too small to gain his attention.***

*Lena*

Another aspect of the invisibility of volunteerism is the spatial one. Voluntary work in wartime Ukraine is commonly performed within enclosed spaces due to constant threats of shelling that restrict the work to be delivered in public spaces. While on the one hand, volunteer centres are open for everyone, the questions of safety are standing foremost. In a conversation with a volunteer who engaged long-term in the performance of one well-known military and humanitarian aid organisation, she emphasised that for security purposes, their hub is not easily accessible, with a gated entrance and disclosed address. Storing an immense amount of goods within the space, it is significant to know who exactly is coming to the space. In the case of *Marsh Zhinok*, security reasons, characterised by the limited access to the hub, are also determined by the political stance of the organisation.

***There were lots of events happening here in the past, where the community was gathering and hanging out. This was a safe space for everybody. Nobody judged anyone. And several times them [right-wing radicals] were coming. No hassle, as there was security. Before the war there was a private security company, they were queer-friendly, and well-known. And main people had a red button on their phones, and they can invisibly press it and in two minutes people in masks were here. Nevertheless, it was happening. And during***

**marches and attacks towards Olena Shevchenko [founder of the organisation]. That's why we are not saying the address. But C14 [radical right-wing organisation], they know where we are. And they are waiting for when they will get permission from above. But now it's not the time. Now it's okay because all of them are there [mobilised to armed forces]. The address is solely in the trusted chats. The bypassers cannot enter.**

*Lena*

This also was mentioned by other feminist activists who turned towards volunteerism since full-scale aggression. The discursive and physical attacks in wartime happen not only by right-wing activists but also by Armed Forces, justifying it by the irrelevance of feminist activism during military conflict. While being threatened not only within physical spaces but online, feminist activists withdraw from public discussion participation as a form of resistance. While volunteerism serves as a form of resistance to emerging issues within wartime society, it is evident that the militarisation of society poses additional challenges for alternative voices and opinions.

Though recognition of voluntary work in Ukraine is based on dominant representations of the movement, *Marsh Zhinok* demonstrated the support of the work within the organisation.

***There is some financial remuneration. Not a monthly one, but it is allocated to those who spend the most time here. Veronika, Natasha, Masha and me. We are here every day. And we are devoted here 24/7. That's why we are getting this financial remuneration.***

*Lena*

As turns apparent, the material and symbolic benefits are closely tied to the time span, devotion to work, as well as capacity to take responsibility.

***I, for example, lost my apartment. And they [Marsh Zhinok] gave me a mattress, pillows, bedsheets and kitchen supplies. If to transform it into finances, this is unbelievably expensive. This is support, this is remuneration. Also, at the end of March, we are going to Truskavets [a health resort in Western Ukraine]. This is paid by the organisation.***

*Natalya*

***I am taking therapy sessions. It is being paid for by Marsh Zhinok.***

*Veronika*

This shows that while the remuneration of volunteers is hierarchised according to time engagement and responsibilities, volunteers themselves get a multitude of symbolic and material appreciation that makes them recognised and visible within the organisation. Thus, *Marsh Zhinok* demonstrates a caring approach towards the actors

of the organisation, which serves as a further motivation for volunteers to pursue their work, and affects an emotional attachment to the organisation.

***We were also invited for a course in Lviv, where we exchanged experiences with other volunteer organisations. We lived in a fancy hotel in Lviv and that was paid by Marsh Zhinok. This all is our reward. Also, an experience, it is such a life experience I am getting here. It is me who should pay for everything I am getting here.***

*Natalya*

In addition to recognition of voluntary work within the organisation, it is crucial to address how volunteerism in *Marsh Zhinok* is influenced by other stakeholders such as state and international donors. Though the immense share of support comes from Ukrainian citizens, volunteerism in Ukraine is largely supported by foreign charity organisations and private companies, predominantly of Global North. Called out by the discourse on Ukraine's victimisation, the donors actively deliver financial aid to local civic institutions. In *Marsh Zhinok* this was exemplified through collaboration with Airbnb, which aimed to provide temporary housing in European countries for women, who fled Ukraine.

What stands out is the requirements to receive the aid, imposed by the international donors. Oftentimes the financial support is allocated in exchange for the project's 'success' story and photo-documentation of 'happy' civilians that received a box of humanitarian aid. Such approaches of donors reveal the neoliberal approach to the provision of aid, where the 'success' of the projects is measured by images of smiley people, residing at the frontline. Nevertheless, public critique of big international organisations is absent due to the potential cuts of any financial support. What is crucial in terms of volunteerism based on alternative political stances, is that while privately it is gaining some support, publicly it is almost absent. That demonstrates the support of mainstream discourses while silencing those not fitting into the wartime agenda of Ukraine. At *Marsh Zhinok* the agency is also predominantly sustained by international donors.

***In Ukraine, we are not as popular as in Europe. We are famous as most of our followers are Ukrainians. But financial support is usually coming from European organisations or the US. Even the Ukrainian Federation of food supply gets money from European Food Bank.***

*Lena*

Despite getting some financial support through grant applications, the risks of post-war support cuts were mentioned. While it is evident that there is an abundance of workload in the NGO sector, the uncertainty about the possible future was addressed. There is a clear awareness of the short-term approach to humanitarian aid, however, a strong dependence of the organisation on international support challenges the possibilities of the initiative's agency.

Simultaneously Western donors are putting pressure on collaboration with the state and municipal representatives. Characterised by the absence of trust and ‘irrelevance’ discourse on activism, supported by the state and police, feminist organisations are reluctant and cautious of partnership with the state. While the ‘heading towards victory’ discourse overshadows any alternative opinions, there is left no room to address structural inequalities and problems within the society. This serves as another evidence of a vast militarisation of Ukrainian society, based on the agreement that problems of civilian life could be solved solely by the military.<sup>118</sup> Thus, feminist activists apply self-censorship in the discussions related to their activism. Furthermore, the vulnerable groups are not considered for the reconstruction project, rendered as lacking subjectivity to be considered. *Marsh Zhinok* is no exception in this case. Due to prior political encounters with state representatives, the initiative has no expectations of state support after the victory. Relying on their own capacities and responsibilities, they strive to be acknowledged as a woman’s organisation that would shed the light on empowerment of women through contribution to the victory. They were addressing the need to formalise volunteer work in order to get some benefits and recognition. However, due to a demonstrated capacity of civilian self-organisation in crisis and exacerbation of the neoliberal trajectory of economic development by the state, it is rather unlikely that the Ukrainian capitalist state would be willing to do it.

#### **5.d.iv. Infrastructure**

Turning towards the urban space as a crucial setting for volunteerism, it was revealed that the present condition of Ukrainian cities displayed a shortage of needed facilities to perform the work. While volunteers within feminist activism were pointing out storing goods at their homes, even ones who operated within their offices claimed the inconvenience of these spaces to deliver humanitarian aid. In general, the location of *Marsh Zhinok* was mentioned as rather central and easily reachable by public transportation. The walking proximity to the metro station serves as evidence of that. However, some volunteers pointed out that novel temporary regulations on public transportation affected their willingness to get to the hub. Since August 1<sup>st</sup> the Kyiv municipality enforced a policy of pausing public transportation for periods of air raid siren activation,<sup>119</sup> which had a profound effect on mobility within Kyiv. While private car owners were not restricted to move around the city, public transportation was handicapped from regular functioning. As claimed by Neil Smith, the value of workers in geographical terms is measured by the commuting limits of the worker.<sup>120</sup> In Kyiv,

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<sup>118</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Globalization and militarism: Feminists make the link* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 4-5.

<sup>119</sup> “Public transport during air raid siren,” Kyiv City, accessed on 30 April 2023, [https://kyivcity.gov.ua/dorohy\\_transport\\_ta\\_parkovky/gromadskiy\\_transport\\_pid\\_chas\\_povitryano\\_trivogi/](https://kyivcity.gov.ua/dorohy_transport_ta_parkovky/gromadskiy_transport_pid_chas_povitryano_trivogi/).

<sup>120</sup> Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (University of Georgia Press, 1990), 182.

new public transportation policies have resulted in stricter regulations on urban mobility. However, the influence of private interests over public ones (driven by municipal initiatives), reflects the broader national political context. This has implications not only for city residents but also for volunteers working throughout the city.

Also, some volunteers compared the location of the Kyiv humanitarian aid hub and Lviv headquarters, pointing out a crucial infrastructural aspect – the proximity to the post office. The volunteer hub in Lviv was located within 200 metres from the post office that facilitated logistical processes.

***Masha registered, for example, 10 parcels, and there was a man Sasha, who loaded these parcels in a trolley and brought them to the post. And this was happening the whole day. This was more convenient, as here Masha is surrounded by all these boxes, sometimes around 150 of them and waits for the courier to arrive the next day and pick it up.***

*Lena*

Moreover, the partnership with the post office in a form of benefits plays an important role in the relationship between volunteerism and urban infrastructure. While two leading postal service companies *Nova Poshta*, a privately owned enterprise, as well as state-managed *Ukrposhta*, are the key logistic actors of package deliveries, what stands out is that the first one granted some benefits to charity and volunteer organisations to perform their work. Creating a separate social project of ‘Humanitarian Aid Delivery’<sup>121</sup>, *Nova Poshta* demonstrated the enthusiasm to support the civic effort, while the state again demonstrated incapability to respond to the immediate needs.

Zooming into the Kyiv humanitarian aid hub itself, it turned apparent that its premises are not sufficient for performing voluntary work. Occupying one floor of a two-floor building shared by *Marsh Zhinok* and *Insight* organisations, volunteers emphasised the need for a bigger space.

***We would really like the space to be longer and bigger. The space is convenient for small organisations, where the food is not packed, and where the volumes are smaller.***

*Lena*

One of the volunteers suggested a solution that could be offered in collaboration with the municipality.

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<sup>121</sup> “Humanitarian Postal Service of Ukraine,” *Nova Poshta*, [https://novaposhta.ua/humanitarian\\_post](https://novaposhta.ua/humanitarian_post), (accessed May 3, 2023).



***It would not be odd to have more space. But for space, we need to pay, and it is a lot of money. On the level of municipality, there could be a free parking lot allocated for us for our work, this would be cool.***

*Veronika*

Despite that, volunteers showed lots of satisfaction with the space due to available facilities such as a kitchen, shower, and room for rest. They also noted an emotional attachment to the space that became such an important venue for volunteers in wartime crisis. The building served as a shelter for them, a meeting point that developed into a second home for many.

***We would be happy to expand the space, but these walls became so dear to us. This Podil [the neighbourhood] is so precious to us. We like it here.***

*Natalya*

What stands out is the power dynamic between *Marsh Zhinok* and *Insight* organisations within the space that regulated access to the existent facilities.

***This space is for a long time the space for 'Insight'. 'Marsh Zhinok' was born out of 'Insight'. Hence, 'Marsh Zhinok' was not prevailing here. But since girls came back from Lviv, most of the people here are from 'Marsh Zhinok'. They occupied this building. 'Insight', of course, is still working here, and there are so many things happening concerning 'Insight' - meetings, and communication with international representatives. And only after comes 'Marsh Zhinok'.***

*Lena*

The dynamic within the space during observations demonstrated that *Insight* is dominant within the space. And once representatives of *Insight* showed up in the common spaces, such as the kitchen, volunteers of *Marsh Zhinok* were moving to the 'packing room'. Initially, the building served as a common space for activists of *Insight* and *Marsh Zhinok* organisations. However, the reorganisation of the agency towards volunteer work, entailing the mobilisation of newcomers, revealed the restructuring of access to space, based on the work performed. This assumes that those, delivering productive work in terms of activism are more visible and dominant within the space, than those engaged in reproductive volunteer labour. Consequently, while being critical of gender labour division and acknowledging a lack of appreciation for reproductive work, *Marsh Zhinok* is trapped into reproducing larger tendencies of labour division that puts a limit to their ideological frame.

## **5.e. Findings**

The analysis of the *Marsh Zhinok* organisation focused on the practices and motivations of volunteers, addressing the work of volunteers and broader relations with the stakeholders involved. As well it pays attention to the impact of access to urban infrastructure and readaptation of the architectural premises for volunteer

needs. The selection of the initiative with a clear political stance, represented by feminist values, constituted a peculiar case for examination. This opened up the possibility to open up how the dichotomy of productive and reproductive work plays out in the women-led environment. Furthermore, this problematises the willingness of volunteers to perform this work, as well as the general circumstance for the reorganisation of the *Marsh Zhinok* agency towards the provision of immediate aid.

The range of practices demonstrated the demand for multifaceted skills, from the specific professional knowledge of running an organisation to the physical capacity to maintain the space and pack the boxes. The availability of needed skills presupposed the distribution of tasks. While co-existing with LGBTQ+ organisation *Insight*, *Marsh Zhinok* as an initiative complies with *Insight's* needs. Due to the professionalised experience, the feminists of *Marsh Zhinok*, as well as activists of *Insight* are the ones, whose work is recognised the most, and frequently considered as a form of paid labour due to the allocation of finances within grants. The non-politicised volunteers, comprised of mobilised internally-displaced women, local students or LGBTQ+ individuals, were mostly engaged in physical work that required minimum effort. What stands out is that availability of time and willingness to take responsibility entailed recruitment of volunteers for more complicated activities, thus signifying full-time job requirements.

While every volunteer is driven by contribution to the collective good, the catalysts of engagement for volunteers vary drastically. Thus, several patterns were identified. Firstly, recently engaged non-politicised volunteers were recruited due to unemployment, part-time remote employment or distance learning. Furthermore, the opportunity to redistribute reproductive labour within the household was mentioned as a supportive factor for volunteering commitment. This demonstrates that the socio-economic conditions of individuals, as well as the availability of time had a significant effect on their mobilisation. Those, affiliated with the values of *Insight* or *Marsh Zhinok* considered volunteerism as a continuation of their activism, as well as the support of the organisation itself. Secondly, voluntary work opened up a possibility of retreat, of escape from a multilayered crisis, faced as on societal, so on a personal level. This work played out as a tool for acquiring control over the situation that propelled the feeling of security and certainty. What stands out is that the monotonous physical work of volunteers evoked a feeling of exhaustion, while on the other hand appeared as a mentally and emotionally empowering practice. Furthermore, the counter-effect was highlighted when one of the volunteers abandoned the exhausting creative profession in order to commit to the difficult volunteer work. Consequently, this unfolded a contested meaning of 'productive' labour, where voluntary work with its immediate responsiveness and outcomes is charged with significant value to uphold society.

The factor of collective action has also contributed greatly to the engagement of volunteers. It turned out apparent that volunteer participation constituted a feeling of belonging to the community, a space of encounter and exchange, particularly for

those, facing the consequences of displacement. This had an astonishing effect on the dynamics within the organisation. Positioned as a feminist space, based on principles of safety, *Marsh Zhinok* carefully curates the profiles of engaged volunteers. Due to the mobilisation of non-politicised volunteers, who priorly did not encounter non-dominant political representations and oftentimes took a prejudiced stance towards alternative ideologies, volunteerism in *Marsh Zhinok* opened up new perspectives for them. Furthermore, the recognition was based on the willingness to work, rather than on gender or sexual identity markers. Thus, it demonstrated that the voluntary work within *Marsh Zhinok* opens up a possibility for collective solidarity, where non-politicised actors design their political stances, alongside debunking the stereotypes about marginalised groups and stigmatised perspectives.

A close look at the broader relations of *Marsh Zhinok* with the Ukrainian volunteer movement has unfolded as rather complex. As a heterogeneous volunteer movement is represented by multiple organisations, usually the large organisations, such as *Prytula Charity Foundation* and state-sponsored ones acquire the most support. Furthermore, majorly run by men, as well as concentrated on the provision of military aid reproduces dominant representations of militarised patriarchal Ukrainian society. As a large share of the feminist movement redirected their human rights activism towards the support of the most vulnerable groups, they still are the ones that are not explicitly recognised within volunteerism in Ukraine. In the case of *Marsh Zhinok*, the initiative stands out as one of the loudest voices within the feminist movement, taking a privileged stance to speak out about women's issues. However, in a current condition of severe restrictions on freedom of speech, justified by a threat to national security, feminist activists tend to pursue extreme self-censorship, mostly delivering their activism through humanitarian aid.

In relation to international donors, volunteerism is visible due to a global victimisation discourse on Ukraine. Nevertheless, the employed methods of aid provision in exchange for 'success stories' unravel the scepticism towards the original intentions of foreign support. An acute pressure on the productivity of the organisation contributes to a competitive nature of the movement, where the ones more successful are allocated greater financial aid. Consequently, due to the threat of loss of any foreign financial support, numerous volunteer organisations, particularly those with a leftist political stance, withdraw from any public critique of the foreign assistance methods.

Despite constant pressure to fit in and struggle for financial resources, *Marsh Zhinok* as an organisation demonstrated a profound recognition of the work, delivered by volunteers within the organisation. Though formal financial remuneration in the form of wages is not provided due to the legal charity status of the organisation, continuous material, emotional and symbolic benefits have been granted. Therapy sessions, gifts and community events, organised on a regular basis, constitute a space of appreciation and support. In contrast to the lack of economic recognition of volunteers'

work on the state level, *Marsh Zhinok* puts an effort to recognise the work. Though benefits are distributed according to the extent of engagement, it yet demonstrates the intention to value the work.

Tracing the relationship between volunteerism and the urban environment through the case study, it was revealed that on the municipal level, there was a shortage of provision and support for volunteers' work. While many adapted their residential or workspaces for volunteer purposes, it demonstrated how self-organised approaches of civilians reconfigured the spaces for immediate needs. In the case of *Marsh Zhinok* humanitarian hub, which previously was used for office work purposes, was reorganised for the provision of aid. Though the availability of a kitchen and shower was highlighted as beneficial, the dynamic between the several groups revealed the hierarchical pattern, where activist work was dominant over voluntary work. This demonstrates how the visibility of 'productive' labour comes at the cost of the invisibility of reproductive labour. Furthermore, the general spatial invisibility of volunteer work explained by security reasons, in *Marsh Zhinok* carried an extra meaning due to the political stance of the organisation.

Additionally, the complex entanglement of voluntary work and urban infrastructure was revealed. As mobility in Kyiv was partially restricted due to a martial law municipal policy on public transportation, this served as an obstacle for urban dwellers, who did not possess any private means of transportation. This advocates that while private interests are being secured, those in vulnerable socio-economic conditions are not considered in urban policy-making. Though the location of *Marsh Zhinok* was reachable by metro connection, it had yet a profound impact on the capacity of volunteers to commit. One of the key stakeholders of volunteerism is the logistics provider that in Ukraine is majorly represented by a state-run postal service and privately-run postal enterprise. While a privately-run enterprise demonstrated the immediate adjustments to the crisis needs, providing benefits and support to volunteer initiatives, state-run postal services demonstrated the reluctance to reorganise their work.

Ultimately, the general shift of agency from conventional political activism towards volunteerism developed not only in *Marsh Zhinok* but throughout the institutionalised Ukrainian feminist movement. Espoused with an anti-military stance, that priorly to the full-scale invasion did not significantly affect their agency, the emerged geographical proximity of the crisis and the absence of the possibility to pursue their activism in a former way forced the multiple feminist initiatives to reprioritise their agency and direct it towards immediate needs. Furthermore, the scale and intensity of the emerged conditions entailed reconsideration of their premise towards the right for self-defence and resistance of Ukrainian society against the brutal, imperial Russian invasion. Though feminist contribution through volunteer work falls under the normative gendered practices of care work that priorly they had a critical position on, they employ volunteerism as a tool to pursue their activism that in circumstances of war entails

immediate outcomes and emancipatory character. Thus, volunteerism for *Marsh Zhinok* evolved into the enactment of collective resistance. However, it is vital to acknowledge the limits of this resistance, as it is highly dependent on the duration of the acute crisis, long-term sustainability, as well as socio-economic factors of volunteers, who would be willing to mobilise in the long run. Overall, in times of vast militarisation of society and construction of victimisation discourse of Ukrainian society, specifically of Ukrainian women, volunteerism acquires empowering nature by granting an agency to women that convert their care work into a message of resistance and shed light on the significance of women's contribution into a collective solidarity project.

## Final thoughts

With this thesis, I have discussed how civilian volunteerism in Ukraine emerged as an informal immediate practice and due to the escalation of military and humanitarian crises transformed into a crucial service for the society. Comprised of affective and physical practices that aim to support the communities, I bind volunteerism with a discourse on social reproduction that takes a form of care labour extended into a public sphere. While commonly social reproductive labour is allocated to the private sphere and tends not to be recognised economically, voluntary work in the Ukrainian case acquired a productive nature, yet performed informally and unpaid. As war condition exacerbates gender labour division, predominantly women engage in volunteerism, perceived as an extension of their caring functions within households. Using available infrastructure and adapting the numerous public spaces, women volunteers showcased active participation that is embraced as a blossoming of civic engagement in Ukraine. However, it turns apparent that political-economic preconditions, which are oftentimes overshadowed by dominant discourses of military crisis, played a crucial role in women's mobilisation.

Tracing a transitional period of Ukrainian political economy, it opens up that integration into a global capitalist system, tied with prevailing kleptocratic political governance had a tremendous effect on the system of social reproduction of Ukrainian society. Furthermore, the adoption of structural adjustment requirements entailed vast privatisation of public assets, as well as severe cuts on the state-managed system of social welfare provision. Women in Ukraine are majorly represented as employees in the public sector, as well as beneficiaries of social welfare support, I argue that the reorganisation of the Ukrainian political economy towards a neoliberal capitalist state comes at the cost of women, exacerbating their precarious and vulnerable condition within the society. Following the historic division of gender roles, the role of carers is ubiquitously relegated to women. Consequently, once the military crisis in Ukraine has unravelled and the state demonstrated inadequacy to support the society, women were pushed not only to perform reproductive labour at home but also to volunteer to support the newly emerged vulnerable groups. This demonstrates that sustaining the society comes at the cost of a double burden on women, who themselves struggling to survive in times of multi-layered crisis in Ukraine. Furthermore, this problematises the willingness of civilian women to engage in voluntary work that opens up as a survival strategy in an acute crisis.

The examination of voluntary work on the ground supported the argument on the hierarchisation of labour division. While the professionalised 'productive' work acquires the most economic and spatial recognition, the physical and affective labour lacks visibility. Though volunteers gain numerous material and financial benefits, their work is perceived as less significant, which reproduces the dominant labour division patterns. Furthermore, the presupposed 'voluntary' nature of the work was

preconditioned by a multitude of factors on several scales. For volunteers the availability of time, stipulated by their socio-economic and mental conditions served as a major drive to engage. While for the organisation, it evolved into a mere tactic to pursue their activism, constrained, as by military crisis, so by national political agenda. Largely, the relations with power structures are characterised by a neoliberal logic where the 'success' measure defines the allocation of finances and visibility. Additionally, this is evident in temporary urban policies that prioritise private interests over the public. Though multi-layered hierarchisation and reproduction of power interests turn out apparent, volunteerism, specifically in *Marsh Zhinok* displayed a potential for solidarity, materialised in a space of encounter, where groups with counter-interests and reached mutual recognition and interdependency through delivering care services. While feminist activists with a critical political stance, on the one hand, employ volunteerism as a tool to pursue their activism, debunking the stereotypes around feminist and LGBTQ+ discourses, on the other hand, voluntary work grants a political voice to others, previously non-politicised individuals.

The general patterns of volunteerism demonstrated the concentration of volunteerism in cities, as well as the provision of aid in the cities. However, women-led initiatives like *Marsh Zhinok* redirected their aid to the most vulnerable groups, not only according to social and economic statuses but also geographically. Prevalence of quality over quantity in aid provision reveals a specific effort to reach those, infallibly disregarded by major volunteer organisations. Responding to the particular needs of vulnerable groups volunteerism acquires an additional social value that challenges the dominant approaches to voluntary work. Furthermore, it turned evident that the grassroots approach to readapt various spaces for volunteerism purposes demonstrates a potential for socialised care work delivery. Though it evolved as a temporary solution, it requires the reimagination of urban policies towards more socially-oriented reforms and tight collaboration with local municipalities and administrations. Therefore, it becomes apparent that social infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools, kindergartens and public spaces requires a drastic rethinking, based on principles of inclusivity and safety that will support women in post-war Ukraine.

Despite a critical take on women's labour in the form of volunteerism, the hope is still there. Exercised on a broader scale, volunteerism develops into a potential tool for women's visibility by converting their gendered knowledge and skills into institutional changes to tackle gender inequality and reimagine socio-spatial structures for a post-war Ukraine. This work evolves as a tactic of acquiring agency and addressing how women's everyday care work, should be recognised as valuable in post-war Ukraine. Though it is hard to predict the course of development of post-war reconstruction project, as well as potential risks for women to be disregarded in the decision-making processes, the vast skills, knowledge and networks established at the grassroots level of volunteerism, planting optimistic beliefs that the Ukrainian post-war state will direct its politics towards more socially-oriented and gender-responsive development.

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