D I S C U S S I O N S

TINA POLEK
NGO "Centre for Applied Anthropology", Kyiv

A SENSE OF BELONGING TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Any war *per se* always evokes sharp and polar emotions. For me, it is hardly possible to write about war in Ukraine from the inside without experiencing these emotions, so I would like to dedicate this text to my own anthropological reflection. I strive to reflect on an inevitable part of living through the war experience, which is *the sense of belonging* to the war. I have to mention that Ukrainians do not use this term as an emic category. We do not have special words to describe this feeling; you just "know" or "don't know" what the war is. My aim is to get deeper into this inner knowledge via my own reflections, as a Ukrainian, by observation of my circle of communication, composed of different people with different backgrounds from central, northern and western Ukraine, and by observation of people in the streets of Kyiv, Vinnytsia and Ivano-Frankivsk.

By using term *the sense of belonging* I mean "the subjective feeling of a deep connection to social groups, physical space, and individual and collective experiences" (Allen, Kern, Rozek, McInerney & Slavich 2021, p. 87). The experience of war is one that provokes a very strong emotional response, and therefore a very strong sense of connection with those who have gone through similar experiences.

However, not everything is as simple as it seems at first glance. Indeed, at the macro level, Ukrainians seem to be extremely united in solidarity, because all citizens of the country have faced the war in one form or another, and therefore everyone belongs to it. People unite in joint efforts to help the Ukrainian army, IDPs, people in the de-occupied territories, etc.

However, at the micro level, Ukrainians experience a sense of belonging to the war in very different ways. If one gets closer to the level of everyday practices, one will see that the experience of the war varies within the country, and the criteria for feeling belonging to this experience are correspondingly different. In contrast to the macro-level, this differentiation of involvement within the country becomes a factor of separation rather than unification. For example, for some Ukrainians, belonging to the war is about the shelling of their neighbourhood when they are in their houses, for others it is about air raid warnings and listening to the sirens. Some would say that it is about a power outage and a blackout they have experienced

in the autumn and winter of 2022/23. At the same time, the sense of belonging to the war refers to the suffering caused by the war, about personal physical losses of loved ones, about a large number of very painful emotional experiences that affected everyone to a very different extent.

Moreover, the sense of belonging to war is always a dynamic process, constantly transforming, depending on the surrounding context (Yuval-Davis 2006, p. 199). Accordingly, at different moments of the war, Ukrainians feel belonging in very different ways. At the same time, they expect to encounter similar emotions in other Ukrainians who have undergone a similar transformation over time. For example, the pain the Mariupol residents experienced at the beginning of the full-scale invasion had different emotional colours and contextual shades than the pain experienced by Mariupol residents who remain in the city today. The war of February 2022, the war of November 2022, and the war of February 2023 are completely different experiences of war for Ukrainians that create distinct senses of belonging in very different ways.

The migration and refugee scholar Nira Yuval-Davis speaks of the *politics of belonging* that begins where "in/out" opposites come into play, and the establishment of boundaries between them (Yuval-Davis 2006, p. 204). And here an important question arises: are there any "insiders" and "outsiders" within the global community of Ukrainians who feel belonging to the war? How to describe the attributes of belonging and who has the right to set these criteria? What experience of war is common for Ukrainians and make them feel the sense of belonging to war?

There are a lot of questions in the air that can separate Ukrainians when they try to define the "true" war experience. Are those who left Ukraine because of the war "insiders" or "outsiders"? Do they still share the experience of war when they are abroad? Have Ukrainian men the right to feel a sense of belonging to war without by taking up arms to defend their country? Are those who have not lost loved ones true "insiders"? Are those who have not lost their homes true "insiders"? I can ask myself questions like this endlessly.

I see this struggle to define what belonging is and who is entitled to belong to the war in Ukraine as the politics of belonging. Regarding the everyday context of war, the specific social conditions and particular narratives of identity constitute the background of a politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006, p. 205). Belonging is constructed not only by experience, but also by different media, as well as by a multitude of local contexts. At the same time, this sense of belonging itself constructs and modifies identities. I see it as a two-way process. Russian-speaking Ukrainians who are now consciously abandoning the Russian language are a prime example. Their identity is being modified by their sense of belonging to the war, and at the same time, their sense of belonging to the war begins to absorb the practice of abandoning the Russian language.

The feeling of belonging is not just an internal emotion. People clearly articulate and demonstrate their belonging to the war both verbally and visually. In fact, refusing to speak Russian is one of the verbal ways of demonstrating belonging. Belonging to the war is also revealed in experiencing and expressing hatred towards Russians

and using obscene language against them. These practices have become normalised over the past year, even among those Ukrainians for whom obscene vocabulary in everyday communication would have previously been unacceptable. The language of belonging immediately helps them to see "friends" and "foes." In the first months of the full-scale war, "we" asked each other constantly "how are you?" and were sincerely surprised when foreigners we knew asked "are you safe?" After all, since February 2022, it has become obvious to everyone inside the war that there are no safe places in Ukraine, even away from the frontline, and this is also one of the narratives of a sense of belonging.

At the same time, belonging is demonstrated visually both offline and online. It can easily be seen on the streets of any Ukrainian city: people wearing clothes with patriotic prints and symbols (prints with the national symbol of the trident, the blue and yellow colours of the national flag, the words "Ukraine", "Good evening, we are from Ukraine!"); coffee shops the shops donate the price of a coffee to the Ukrainian Armed Forces; local businesses advertising that they donate part of their profits to the Ukrainian army or posting information about current fundraisers for the military; street musicians singing patriotic songs; and patriotic songs on the radio and on television. All of this creates a certain background belonging that is to be followed and spread. Consumer behaviour also demonstrates a certain belonging; more and more people choose Ukrainian brands, especially those brands that demonstrate support for the Ukrainian army.

Belonging to the war is present in the everyday online life of many Ukrainians. In fact, it is gradually provoking the formation of a new etiquette on social media. When the full-scale invasion began, the content that people shared underwent fundamental changes. For example, everyday life disappeared from Instagram, and the social network turned into reposts of news about Russian crimes and became a way to disseminate information about current fundraisers for the needs of the Ukrainian army or people affected by the war. Photos in beautiful dresses suddenly became inappropriate. Ukrainians who fled the war and went abroad were condemned and despised for showing their new everyday life on Instagram. There was even a practice of creating public posts, for example, about fundraisers, but posting photos from a party or vacation only for a limited number of people to avoid misinterpreting somebody's belonging. Of course, these rules have also changed over time, and everyday photos in coffee shops or gyms are back now in spring 2023, but revealing somebody's everyday coffee, meetings with friends or, showing some parties, with no mention of the war at all, is unacceptable from the point of view of the new ethics.

However, the sense of belonging is still about what people have in common, and therefore about not being indifferent to others who are going through similar experiences. The problem is in defining the experience of war that will be common to all Ukrainians. It works on the macro level, where all Ukrainians are citizens who have faced the war, and therefore who belong to the same country. But it does not work at the micro level, where Ukrainians' everyday life experiences of war are completely different. So, it raises a question: what kind of experience may be regarded as "true"

and confers the right to feel a sense of belonging? And who can set these criteria? It is important to find answers to these questions, because such a sense of belonging is supported by common strong emotions, and thus has a chance to become the basis for strong Ukrainian solidarity in the future.

LITERATURE

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Author's Address:
Tina Polek, PhD
NGO "Centre for Applied Anthropology", Kyiv
Email: tina.momot@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0001-5244-2095