

AGAINST ALL ODDS: REFLECTIONS ON VIOLENCE AND CIVILITY THROUGH PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF UKRAINIAN STUDENTS

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The purpose of the present study was to understand, through personal narratives, the experiences of Ukrainian university students who participated in the 2013–2014 Maidan revolutionary events and to juxtapose their narratives with the theoretical discourses on violence and civility drawn from the works of several contemporary Western thinkers. The data analysis resulted in the identification of five interrelated themes: “If Not Me, Then Who? If Not Now, Then When?” The Participants’ Motivation for Activism; Violence Contextualized within the Maidan Events; Ukraine vs. Russia: A “Hybrid” War; Civility as an Antidote to Violence; and Big Hopes and Dreams for Ukraine. The results of the present study convey the participants’ stories of bravery, dedication to the cause worthy of pursuit, and the belief in one’s ability to engender societal change. The findings of the present study provide important implications for the scholarship on violence, just war theory, and civility.

C*ontra spem spero* (I will hope against all odds) is an inspiring message by Lesya Ukrainka (1871–1913), a Ukrainian poetess and public intellectual. This message has inspired thousands of Ukrainians fighting today for the unity of their country in the midst of continued military conflict with Russia. The history of this conflict dates back to November 2013 when the Ukrainian government decided not to sign a promised Association Agreement with the European Union, which most Ukrainians supported because they wanted to be part of the European family of nations instead of remaining within the so-called “commonwealth” of the three former Soviet Union nations: Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine (Lyubashenko, 2014).

In November 2013, thousands of Ukrainians gathered together at the central Square of Independence, also known as Maidan, in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, to protest the government’s decision. The demonstrations continued through 2014 and acquired a symbolic name—after the central square—Maidan. Used interchangeably with Maidan, Euromaidan is another name for the same events. Demonstrations of protest have spread in other regions of Ukraine. While peaceful in the beginning, the protest eventually turned violent due to the government’s attempts to suppress the demonstrators with violent forces. The most violent events took place in January 2014 when government snipers murdered the first 100 protesters who became commemorated as the *Nebesna Sotnya* (“Heavenly Hundred”; Sakwa, 2016).

Russia did not react to the Maidan events amicably. In February 2014, under the pretext of saving the Russian-speaking population (majority population in Crimea) from the supposed threat of suppression by the new Ukrainian

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government, Russia annexed Crimea, a sovereign territory of Ukraine. When Donetsk and Luhansk (eastern Ukrainian regions with a Russian-speaking majority) unlawfully declared their territorial independence from Ukraine, Russia assisted the separatists with military ammunition and other means, while denying such aid through official communication channels. Ukraine responded with military force, the *anti-terrorist operation* (ATO), in order to protect its territorial integrity. Hence, an undeclared war between Russia and Ukraine ensued and continues to rage, claiming thousands of lives on both sides (Lyubashenko, 2014; Sakwa, 2016).

In September 2014, Ukraine agreed to a 12-point ceasefire plan during talks with separatist leaders and Russian officials in Minsk, Belarus. However, none of the points from the Minsk agreement have been fully implemented. The presidents of France, Russia, and Ukraine, and Chancellor Merkel of Germany met in Minsk in February 2015 in order to attempt another agreement to stop the fighting. More diplomatic attempts were made to resolve the conflict in December 2019, when France and Germany arranged peace talks between Russia and Ukraine, without much success (Sakwa, 2016). Alas, the conflict continues and its death toll has risen to over 14,000.

An examination of the extant literature relevant to the present study revolves around historical background of the Maidan events and the analysis of the events through the lens of theoretical discourses on violence (Arendt, 1970, 1994, 1998, 2005; Sorel, 1999), just war theory (JWT; Elshtain, 1992, 2000, 2003), and civility (Collingwood, 1992). While not exhaustive due to the limited nature of the present study, the review of literature underscores the issues particularly pertinent to the present study. Worth noting is the fact that contemporary studies that analyze the 2013–2014 Maidan events are primarily published in English by American, British, and Canadian authors (e.g., Åslung, 2015; Bachman & Lyubashenko, 2014; Cybriwsky, 2015; de Ploeg, 2017; Halling & Stewart, 2015; Kuzio, 2015; Sakwa, 2016; Shapovalova & Burlyuk, 2018; Subtelny, 2009; Van Herpen, 2015; Wilson, 2014; Yekelchuk, 2015), rather than Ukrainian scholars. While these sources provide rich accounts of the Maidan events, the history of Ukraine, and the developments in the

post-Maidan events, they are accessible only to researchers and scholars fluent in English.

Deeper understanding of the nature of the 2013–14 Maidan events, ethnic and linguistic differences in various regions of Ukraine, and the underlying reasons for the military conflict between Ukraine and Russia warrants a glimpse into the history of Ukraine. In August 1991, Ukraine declared its independence from the USSR shortly after its dissolution. While the event is undeniably significant, the history of the formation of Ukrainian nationhood and its geopolitical spaces remains complex and, to an extent, is still contested by some nations (Sakwa, 2016). Ukraine's declaration of independence in 1991 presented a direct threat to "Russian historical mythology" kept alive through the memory of Kyivan Rus, the first East Slavic polity "claimed by Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians as the foundation of their respective state traditions" (Yekelchuk, 2015, p. 27).

The current borders between Ukraine and Russia "coincide with the borders that existed between the Russian Empire's *guberniyas* (provinces) with a Ukrainian majority and those provinces with a Russian majority" (Balcer, 2014, p. 98). There are two main dividing lines in Ukrainian history: one is between the east and the west and the other is between the north and the south. As a result of these historical divisions, the Russian language dominates in the south and east, where most of Ukrainian Russians currently reside, while the Ukrainian language dominates in the western and central parts of Ukraine (excluding Kyiv) which are populated primarily by ethnic Ukrainians. Linguistic and cultural issues still remain contentious (De Ploeg, 2017).

Ukraine has lived through the turmoil of many tragic events while fighting for freedom from foreign invasions through centuries (Kuzio, 2015; Sakwa, 2016; Subtelny, 2009; Van Herpen, 2015). Subtelny (2009) is one of the most recognized authorities to document the history of Ukraine—a must read source for individuals seeking a detailed account of it. Kuzio (2015) asserted that history does not have to become the destiny of the people who want to change the course of their lives. Kuzio's account of the seven cycles of the current history of Ukraine pertains specifically to the context

of the present study because it provides a clear insight into how Ukrainians can move forward, post-Maidan, to unite under a common political will in order to fight corruption and facilitate European integration.

Sakwa (2016) delved into the gist of the politics of the front line to examine the Maidan events through the historical lens of multiple conquests of Ukrainian lands by several warring Western powers. Worth noting is the fact that throughout its history Ukraine has never invaded the territories of other nations. Instead, it defended itself against multiple invasions by other nations (Subtelny, 2009). Bachman and Lyubashenko (2014) explored the Maidan uprising through the lens of prior political events. Their 500-plus-page volume features a compilation of chapters that represent social and political science accounts of ethnic and cultural diversity of Ukraine, nationalism and ideological identities, and Russian-Ukrainian relations in terms of conflict and contested identities, among many others. Such accounts are significant to consider for the context of the present study because they shed additional light on the Maidan uprising and its consequences. For example, Balcer (2014) dove deeply into Ukraine's ethnic and religious structures over the past three centuries which set the stage for his rendition of the Maidan events.

De Ploeg (2017) focused extensively on the history of Ukraine in order to explain the complexity of the current divisions between various regions of Ukraine and provides insight into the ways to reclaim Ukraine's unified status. Finally, Yekelchuk (2015) detailed the 2013–2014 events and beyond, taking the readers on the journey of the twists and turns in the complex history of Ukraine. Yekelchuk (2015) is particularly significant, within the context of the present study, in terms of an exhaustive analysis of the history of Ukraine with a laser focus on the conquests of Ukrainian lands by various warring powers and the divisive ideologies and allegiances resulting from these conquests. Subsequently, it is only through a deeper exploration of the complex history of Ukraine that the Maidan and post-Maidan events can be more adequately comprehended by uninformed audiences.

Essential to the present study was an exploration of violence, its nature, manifestations,

forms, and controversies. The seminal works by Sorel (1999) and Arendt (1970, 1994, 1998, 2005) are perhaps most influential when outlining theoretical discourses. Sorel (1999), one of the most frequently quoted sources on the nature of violence, investigated the functions of violence in actual social conditions. Sorel detailed the accounts of violent acts in contexts that ranged from proletariat violence in Russia to vendetta in Corsica, and from brutality of criminals to the Spartan heroes fighting to preserve the civilization of the ancient world. Sorel underscored the controversial nature of violence, some forms of which can have historical value, and claimed that the problems of violence still remain very obscure. One of Arendt's (1970) initial arguments was that, throughout the history of humankind, violence has played an enormous role in human affairs. Yet the notion of violence has been seldom addressed. Both Sorel's and Arendt's works were important to consider for the purposes of the present study in order to determine how the participants render violence in the context of the Maidan events and beyond.

Historical value judgments inevitably entail an inquiry into justifiable and unjustifiable forms and ends of violence. Elshtain (1992, 2000, 2003) presented a detailed account of the history and developments of just war theory (JWT) that drew demarcation lines between justifiable and unjustifiable acts of violence with regard to international and moral law. Several questions were posed for the participants of the present study in order to evaluate the on-going military conflict between Ukraine and Russia through the litmus test of JWT. An examination of other and more contemporary studies on the nature of the same conflict added to an overall discourse on JWT. For instance, Van Herpen's (2015) analysis of what he and other scholars call a hybrid war between Ukraine and Russia and Wilson's (2014) extensive study on the Ukrainian crisis shed additional light on the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

One of the most important outcomes of the Maidan uprising was reawakening of people's civic consciousness and civil society in Ukraine. Therefore, examination of literature focusing on civility was paramount for the purposes of the present study. According to Collingwood (1992), civility is an antidote to violence.

Collingwood's principles of social justice rest on the idea that building the body politics of free agents capable of ensuring law and order entails the prerequisites of having civility and civil society. Additionally, Shapovalova and Burlyuk's (2018) volume features several case studies conducted in Ukraine by international scholars that focused specifically on exemplars of civic organizations in Ukraine and ways to strengthen and sustain civil society that still remains weak in Ukraine. Áslung (2015) and Halling and Stewart (2015) presented substantive discussions on the complexity of the processes pertaining to rebuilding civic society in Ukraine. All in all, exploration of the aforementioned literature provided rich context for the present study, informed my research goals and interview guide, and assisted me in the process of data analysis.

The history of Ukraine continues to unfold as the present article makes its way to readers with the hope of conveying the messages from a not-so-distant past, a past marked by tremendous tribulations. While it is beyond the scope of the present study to address the Maidan events in detail, my goal was to acquaint readers with participants' personal narratives of these events. Narrative inquiry—perhaps more so than other qualitative approaches—can be indispensable in this regard because it allows for the uncovering of the uniqueness of human experience through evocative storytelling (Goodall, 2008), thus paving alternative pathways to elicit the readers' responses.

The purpose of the present study was to understand, through personal narratives, the experiences of Ukrainian university students who participated in the 2013–2014 revolutionary events and to juxtapose their narratives with the philosophical discourses on violence and civility drawn from the works of several contemporary Western thinkers. The following research questions guided the present study: What motivated Ukrainian university students to participate in the Maidan events? What meaning do they ascribe to violence and civility within the context of the Maidan events? What are their aspirations for the future in the post-Maidan Ukraine?

Method

Methods “do not emerge out of thin air: they are informed by particular theoretical

sensibilities” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012, p. 5). The theoretical sensibilities of the present study are rooted in the 19th century's anti-positivist philosophical movement that turned its attention to human emotions and desires (Lukenchuk, 2013). The same movement engendered a narrative turn (Riessman, 2008). Narrative researchers “view stories as conditioned by social contexts, discursive resources, and communicative circumstances” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012, p. 7). Narratives empower and do political work; they reveal truths about human experience (Riessman, 2008). As a methodological approach, narrative is particularly appealing when it comes to understanding lived experiences of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I turn to narrative to document, understand, and describe the personal accounts of Ukrainian students participating in the 2013–2014 Maidan demonstrations. Closely aligned with narrative is critical discourse analysis (CDA) that is “as much theory as method” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 121). CDA is most commonly understood as language-in-use (Gee, 2005), language as social practice (Wodak & Meyer, 2002), or situated speech (Johnstone, 1996). CDA complements narrative in the present study in order to juxtapose the language of participants' personal accounts and the discourses of violence and civility drawn from the works of Arendt (1970, 1994, 1998, 2005), Collingwood (1992), and Elshtain (1992, 2000, 2003).

Site and Participants

Clearwater University (pseudonym), located in Western Ukraine, became the site for the present study. As a native of Ukraine, I benefited from having a network of contacts in Ukraine, one of whom became a gate-keeper and helped me to identify two students who expressed an interest in my project. Using a snow-ball technique, I managed to recruit four more participants. A total of six students volunteered to participate in the present study. The criteria for selection constituted the students' affiliation with the site university, their participation in the local Maidan events, and their unique experiences as activists and leaders of the movement. At the time of the present study, the participants were undergraduate and graduate male students between the ages of 18 and 23. They represented a variety of academic

majors, including computer programming, law, mathematics, philosophy, and political science. A pseudonym was assigned to each participant in order to protect anonymity.

Data Collection and Analysis Strategies

Semi-structured in-depth interviews with the participants provided the main data for analysis. An interview guide and a consent form were developed in both Ukrainian and English. The aforementioned works of Arendt (1970, 1994, 1998, 2005), Collingwood (1992), and Elshain (1992, 2000, 2003) informed several interview questions in my quest to understand the meaning that the participants ascribed to the notions of violence and civility within the context of the Maidan events. Additional interview questions centered on the participants' activism and aspirations for their future in the post-Maidan Ukraine. Each interview lasted between 90 to 120 minutes. I conducted the interviews in Ukrainian, audio-recorded, transcribed, and sent the transcripts to the interviewees for verification of accuracy.

When analyzing the interview data, I relied on Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), and Saldaña (2013). I embraced Miles et al.'s (2014) assumption that coding *is* analysis and codes are "chunks" of data—words, phrases, sentences, or longer language units—that convey symbolic meaning to the "descriptive information" of the study (pp. 71-72). Coding is also an intentional process. When coding the interview data, I searched for the language chunks intending to unravel the meaning of the participants' experiences, thus addressing my research purposes. Subsequently, an initial list of codes was comprised of literal words and phrases during the first close read of the interview transcripts.

Furthermore, following Saldaña's (2013) manual, the interview data analysis went through several cycles, beginning with open coding (initial identification of literal, or *in vivo* codes) and ending with conceptual coding by clustering, or lumping, initially identified codes into meaningful units, or themes, presented in the section below. Finally, I employed what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) call a three-dimensional approach (3D design) in order to analyze narrative data through interaction, continuity, and situation. For instance, interaction

refers to the participants' interactions based on their feelings, reactions, and dispositions, continuity represents the connection between the past, the present, and a glimpse into the future, and situation provides the context of the participants' experiences. Ultimately, my goal as a narrative researcher was to capture the portraits of the participants by zooming in (attention to detail) and out (generality; Gaskin, Berente, Lytinen, & Yoo, 2014).

Validation Criteria

Qualitative researchers are often called to the task of validating their research findings as transparent and comprehensible only through interviews and observations (Flick, 2014). As a counterpoint to this statement, Flick (2014) recommends using method-appropriate criteria based on specific methodologies with particular theoretical underpinnings that allow for a peculiarity of the qualitative research process. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest "seeking coherence of participants' narratives" (p. 269). Subsequently, in order to validate the present study's findings, I leaned on specific expectations of narrative in order to restore the participants' experiences, honoring the authenticity of their accounts, and practicing reflexivity. Reflexive thinking and writing are other ways to enhance the credibility of narrative studies. Throughout the present study, I kept a journal of self-reflective notes that enabled me to address my potential biases and my own values, experiences, and orientations that might have inadvertently influenced data analysis.

Member checking and seeking feedback from the participants were of paramount importance for the present study. Member checks add to the accuracy of the account (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Not only did I obtain the participants' confirmation regarding the accuracy of their interview transcripts, but I also shared the segments of my thematic analysis with them in order to solicit additional feedback about whether I got it right. Three out of six participants chose to provide feedback. Rich and thick descriptions of the participants' experiences added to the validation of the research findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Furthermore, trustworthiness allowed me to enhance validation of the findings. Throughout data analysis, I asked myself as to how

persuasive the descriptions of the participants' narratives were and how appropriately the arguments were supported by the participants' authentic voices (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Finally, as a qualitative researcher, I was on a quest for a deeper *understanding* [my emphasis] of the participants' experiences (Wolcott, 1990). My ultimate goal was to present a compelling narrative that could illuminate readers' understanding of the participants' stories: their motivation to join the Maidan protests, their patriotism, and their unwavering faith in a brighter future of Ukraine.

Results

Qualitative researchers are meaning finders (Miles et al., 2014) whose purpose is to transform data into meaning-making categories, patterns, or themes that can convey the richness and complexity of human experience. The data analysis of the present study resulted in the identification of five interrelated themes: (a) "If Not Me, Then Who? If Not Now, Then When?" The Participants' Motivation for Activism; (b) Violence Contextualized within the Maidan Events; (c) Ukraine vs. Russia: A "Hybrid" War; (d) Civility as an Antidote to Violence; and (e) Big Hopes and Dreams for Ukraine. In the first theme, I focused on restorying the participants' decision and motivation to participate in Maidan demonstrations. The remaining four themes described the participants' dispositions on violence, civility, and war based on their experiences within the context of the Maidan events, as well as their aspirations for the future in the post-Maidan Ukraine.

"If Not Me, Then Who? If Not Now, Then When?" The Participants' Motivation for Activism

For the participants in the present study, it was not a question of whether, but rather when to take action and stand in opposition to the Yanukovych regime. They made a conscious choice to participate in Maidan demonstrations, often to the detriment of their health and against the will of their parents who worried about their lives. They exhibited unparalleled resolve and resilience when participating in Maidan events and emerged as leaders and organizers. They were fearless and undeterred.

Nick said it best when recounting the reasons to join Maidan:

I remember it was Monday and it was raining heavily. It was very cold. I was standing there soaked in water, trembling, and holding firmly the Ukrainian flag. At that very moment, I realized something important was happening. Otherwise, why would I be standing here? A local reporter approached us and asked "Why?" I said we didn't want Ukraine to join so-called "commonwealth" with Russia because it would mean the rebirth of the former USSR. That's why I was standing there. If not me, then who? If not now, then when?

While each of their stories is unique in itself, the participants shared many commonalities regarding their backgrounds and the paths that led them to Maidan. All six participants resided and studied in western Ukraine. All of them came from what could be loosely identified as lower-to-middle-class families. Their parents were fairly well-educated, which was typical for their generation of Ukrainians, and they held various mid-level positions such as a school teacher, a factory worker, or a school janitor. What was also common to a typical Ukrainian family was encouraging their children's education and extra-curricular activities. Due to the paucity of economic opportunities in Ukraine, some parents of the participants had to travel overseas to earn a decent income in order to ensure their children's education. All six participants were highly encouraged by their parents to pursue higher education and, with it, the prospect of social mobility. Another common feature among all the participants was their connection with the generational history of their grandparents or relatives who fought for the independence of Ukraine during World War II. In this regard, the participants often referred to their "call of blood" to participate in the Maidan demonstrations.

For example, Alex, who was only 18 at the time of the present study, was greatly influenced by his grandmother who instilled a sense of patriotism in him since childhood. An inherent sense of patriotism compelled him to go to Kyiv when he heard about the first demonstrations. He went to Kiev against the advice of his

parents who worried about his safety. When in Kyiv, Alex was captivated by the brotherhood of so many people driven by a common purpose and vision. He had spent only a few days in Kyiv before violent actions erupted. Upon his return to Clearwater, he joined the National Alliance, a spontaneous organization of young people, and continued to participate in demonstrations in Clearwater throughout their duration.

Nikita's path to Maidan was also a natural outcome of his patriotic upbringing and his own patriotic beliefs. Under his leadership, the students created a group of Young People of the Nation for Eurointegration. They gathered in the main square of Clearwater on November 22, 2013. In the beginning, there were only about 30 of them and, within several weeks, about 10,000 people were demonstrating in the streets of Clearwater. Nikita stated: "We organized ourselves near university dormitories and decided to go downtown. Nobody asked us to do that; nobody promised us money. It was our consciousness that dictated our action. We realized we need to do something."

Anton did not support the protests in the beginning when he watched the demonstrations in Kyiv on television. Soon enough, he realized the purpose of the demonstrations and embraced the idea of Eurointegration. Ultimately, he joined the demonstrators in Clearwater. He admitted how surprised he was when watching so many people showing up to protest in the streets of Clearwater. Anton recalled one of his grade school teachers who told him about a heightened sense of fairness that compels individuals to take action. So, it was this sense of fairness that compelled him to join Maidan. Anton became the head of a student self-governing committee at the university. They had an idea to create a "coordination council" for demonstrations. They started a dialogue with local governments during the Maidan demonstrations. He was also one of the leaders of the Maidan co-ordination committee. They wanted to make sure that everyone behaved decently and that there was no violence and no violation of the law. They also had to deal with the surveillance of their lives. Eventually, the local government invited them for a meeting. The young people claimed they did not represent any party; they were civic activists representing people. They did not want to take over

the official government. They wanted justice for individuals who were unfairly treated and punished. Anton said they agreed with these requirements because they did not want violence either. Anton traveled extensively in various parts of Ukraine, including the east. What he learned from communicating with different people who resided in various geographic areas of Ukraine was that they had similar views on justice and fairness. Anton thought it was important to keep the lines of communication open among the people of Ukraine residing in different areas and holding different beliefs if Ukrainians wanted to keep their nation a cohesive whole.

Gregory developed a sense of civic responsibility when he was only 15 years old. His call to activism was a "call of blood" because of his family's history of being fighters for Ukraine's independence in the 20th century. His interest in politics developed when he was attending the "school of young politicians" in his school district. Gregory recalled: "One evening, I read a newspaper article about president Yanukovich's decision not to sign an agreement for Ukraine to join the European Association, which was provisioned by the Constitution. It was such a blow to me." He decided to travel to Kyiv in order to experience the events firsthand, which contributed enormously to his personal growth. In Kyiv, he met with students who were older than him. He learned from them how important it was to grow personally before venturing on any action and he realized how much he still needed to learn. Gregory recounted how he and his fellow protestors started out with only 20 or 30 people and eventually more and more people joined them regardless of the cold weather. They sang the Ukrainian anthem every other hour. Then, in a few days, when the oppositional forces accepted their surrender in Kyiv, many people left Kyiv for their local cities and towns.

However, like Gregory, many others remained in Maidan. Gregory stated that, regardless of who was on what side, the majority of Ukrainian people supported Eurointegration. To Gregory and other participants, this support was common sense. Gregory also thought that the bloodshed could have been avoided in Kyiv. Gregory remained in Kyiv even when the government's violent actions against demonstrators

escalated. He reflected on the moment of direct confrontation with the *Berkut* forces:

I felt fear. [At the same time] I felt the great power of people that stood behind me. One has to realize that behind all of us are our families. This is the Rubicon between us and them [*Berkut* forces]. So you stand there and persevere. Everyone was ready to stand there and to die.

Then, there was an effort on behalf of the government to disperse the demonstrators in Kyiv. Gregory realized he could not do more in Kyiv and eventually came back to Clearwater. Upon his return to Clearwater, Gregory continued to participate in local demonstrations. Gregory described an episode that reconfirmed the participants' motivation to join Maidan:

I remember it was an early morning when we were standing on the main square in Clearwater. It was very cold. A woman was passing by. We looked like poor little kids, cold and hungry. She asked us what was it that we were doing there. We said we were recreating our future. She said we wouldn't achieve anything. I rebutted and said we would change this country together. I bet she didn't believe me but, at that point, I realized that was our ultimate goal and that's why we were standing on Maidan.

Gregory was one of the self-identified organizers of the student demonstrations in Clearwater. He felt a moral responsibility to participate in Maidan. Eventually, Gregory became sick, but still continued to be involved in the Maidan events. He recalled how, at two or three o'clock in the morning, he would walk to Maidan because there was no public transportation functioning at those early hours. By February, 2014, there were practically no people remaining in the square. Many people had left because of health problems and others because of disillusionment.

Orest's path to Maidan bears many similarities to that of the other study participants. Since childhood, he had developed a keen interest in the history of Ukraine. His family history was also a living history of his ancestors who fought for the freedom of Ukraine during World War II. Orest clearly remembered a phone call at

midnight about the uprising in Kyiv. The next day he gathered some people together and they went to the main square in Clearwater in order to express their support for fellow demonstrators in Kyiv. He considered himself to be "sort of a leader" of the local student unit. Looking back on Maidan, Orest recalled:

For centuries, Ukrainians have been fighting for their independence and freedom. So, we stayed on Maidan for our freedom and against the tyranny of oppression. My parents didn't want me to join Maidan. So, I told them I was going out, while participating in the demonstrations. Many thought of me as a fool. I lost friends because they thought it was all in vain for me to go there and freeze. But I went and stayed there, under the rain and snow. There were moments when there were only 15 of us standing there and singing the Ukrainian anthem. We were standing there not to gain anything, but because out of our own free will.

Similar to other participants, Orest stated that their intention was to have peaceful demonstrations. Their goal was to fight the corruption and deceit of the government authorities and to make a radical change in society that could ensure true democracy. The participants' narratives about their paths to Maidan capture a telling story, perhaps representative of thousands of others, who stayed committed in the squares of resistance regardless of the weather conditions and warnings by their loved ones about subsequent retributions. They exhibited bravery, poise, and conviction in doing something right. After all, under similar circumstances, one may ask oneself: "If not me, then who? If not now, then when?"

Violence Contextualized within the Maidan Events

All participants agreed that violence is part of human nature yet, on the other hand, humans should rely on reason to solve violent conflicts without resorting to violence. For instance, Alex stated: "Violence is natural to human beings. It is the drive for destruction, showing one's dominance over others. We need to rely on reason to live a civilized life." Nick equated violence with power where one person takes

advantage of another. Gregory echoed this sentiment by saying that violence is a “desire for destruction” and “showing one’s dominance over others.” Orest brought forth the argument about violence as a primordial instinct of ownership and domination. Primordial instincts often take over in the heat of the moment. Orest reflected on being a sickly and overweight child and, as a result, he often felt humiliated and bullied by other kids:

I was small and fat. When in college, I enrolled in martial arts. Now, sometimes I meet guys from my school and I know I can beat them but I understand it would make no sense because it was long time ago and those were the circumstances. I never had a desire to take revenge. I react differently as an adult, even if I feel nervous sometimes and feel like punching someone. I ignore these feelings. It is not right to respond to violence by violence. Reason should take over. This is how I was brought up, that is, to think before doing anything.

Interestingly, all participants made it clear that violence in general is not justifiable and that violent acts should not elicit violent responses unless it is absolutely necessary, such as in the case of defending one’s family or an unlawful invasion into one’s country. As Orest emphasized, reason should take over if we are to sustain peaceful and constructive lives. The participants continued to reflect on violence and its justifiable or unjustifiable ends when discussing the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Ukraine vs. Russia: A “Hybrid” War

When attempts for a peaceful resolution of the conflict with Russia failed, Ukraine started ATO against separatist forces supported by Russian troops. The conflict continues and, to date, has claimed over 14,000 lives. The tragedy and ambiguity of this military conflict rest in the fact that Ukraine never officially declared war against the Russian occupation of Crimea or the Russian support of separatists in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions of Ukraine and Russia never officially admitted to such occupation or support. The participants of the present study unanimously and unequivocally expressed

their outrage against the Russian occupation of Crimea and Russia’s support of the separatist forces in the two eastern Ukrainian regions.

For instance, similar to the other participants’ understanding of the current war in Ukraine, Nikita expressed: “What’s going on is a war, a ‘hybrid’ war, and it is accompanied by the war of information.” Nick conveyed the participants’ common understanding regarding the actions of Ukraine’s ATO launched against the Russian aggression by saying that ATO is a “veil because terrorist operations do not last that long.” In fact, in April 2018, ATO was renamed Joint Forces Operation (JFO) so as to recognize Russia as an aggressor. Russia has continually justified its alleged right to protect ethnic Russians and Russian speakers “abroad,” such as in the eastern regions of Ukraine.

One of the most interesting findings of the present study was the participants’ responses to the nature of violence that marks the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine. It was JWT—discussed in other sections of the present paper—that prompted several interview questions intended for a litmus test on justifiable or unjustifiable forms of violence in the Maidan events and beyond. In a nutshell, JWT differentiates between justifiable and unjustifiable uses of military force under the moral and international laws. Remarkably, when asked what they think about Russian aggression against Ukraine, all participants stated that it was completely unjustifiable. For instance, Nick stated: “Russia’s war against Ukraine is both unjust and unjustifiable. Russia has been the imperial power for centuries, occupying people and territories. Ukraine is defending itself. Ukraine is a victim.” Orest confirmed: “Nobody has the right to occupy the territory of another country.”

When it came to the question about Ukraine’s military actions against Russia, the responses varied. While most of the participants agreed that Ukraine’s military response to Russia is justifiable because Ukraine defends its territorial integrity, some participants eluded to the complexity of the situation. For instance, Anton said that justice is a “complex question” and that “we need to know more details about what’s going on behind the scene.” Gregory asserted that some of the Ukraine’s actions against Russia are justifiable while others are not, specifically with regard to civilians who

live in contested territories and occasionally are killed in the crossfire: “Innocent human sacrifices cannot be justifiable.” However, as Gregory and other participants affirmed, Ukrainians are defending their territory, their land. Additionally, the participants reflected on the continuity of the conflict and predicted its duration between three and 15 years. Their predictions seemed to be prophetic: 2020 marked the 16th anniversary of this tragic conflict. The war continues to rage and claim innocent lives.

Civility as an Antidote to Violence

Data analysis revealed interesting findings with regard to the participants’ understanding of civility and civil society, as well as their dedication to rebuilding civil society in the post-Maidan Ukraine. The participants expressed a common belief in civility as an antidote to violence. The principles of civility can be particularly appealing to the people and nations exhausted by years of violent conflict who aim to restore relative normalcy. Similarly, the participants of the present study rendered the return to normalcy as one of healing the wounds of the conflict and restoring civility in the lives of all Ukrainians. Like other participants, Orest believed that Ukrainians are “inherently freedom lovers, so they will fight for civil society.” Nick, in agreement with other participants, claimed that “the task of our generation is to build a new model of Ukrainian society, to create a new mentality.” At the same time, the participants acknowledged the fact that civil society in Ukraine is in its embryonic stage. Nikita expressed the sentiment common to all participants that corruption permeates all spheres of Ukrainian life and remains the main obstacle to much needed reforms.

Regardless of the crisis in post-Maidan Ukraine, the participants of the present study looked optimistically into their country’s future. Gregory envisioned Ukraine as a new society of free citizens where everyone has equal rights and is aware of their responsibilities. He stated:

We have a great potential. We have to build a strong civil society from bottom up. I am convinced we have the potential to do that. It is my dream to build such society. We don’t have a middle choice: it is either we build a new society or not.

The participants’ narratives in the present study reflect larger trends among Ukrainians who chose to participate in the demonstrations, one of which is a reawakening of their civic duties and aspirations. All participants of the present study sincerely believed in the power of people to rebuild the society free of corruption and based on democratic principles of civil society.

Big Hopes and Dreams for Ukraine

What does the future hold for Ukraine? Nick admitted that Ukrainians cannot yet speak of a great future: “At first, we have to take control of our destiny.” Gregory expressed similar ideas common to all participants:

We can be disappointed with the results of Maidan but we can never be disappointed with our ideas. For us, it was the end of one phase and the beginning of another. We are beginning to change people’s worldview, to show people that the country can change. Building a new state, a quality civil society is our goal and what we believe in.

Nick continued to keep in touch with many of his co-participants in the Maidan demonstrations. Their current goal is to become deputies or assistant deputies in local governments so they can change or improve the system from within.

Anton hoped that the current hybrid war with Russia would end soon and he would not need to defend Ukraine with weapons in his hands. His dream was to become a professional, to have a big family, and to make his country prosperous. Gregory’s new son was the source of his belief in the future of Ukraine. He stated:

The moment I took my son in my hands, I told myself that I will do everything I can so that he lives in a normal country, so that he never has to go to Maidan. I want him to walk safely on the streets, play, grow, study, find a normal job, marry, have his own family, and never worry about what will happen tomorrow. [I want him] to become an active citizen of the society and at the same time being aware of the importance of service to his country. Think that before Maidan, we did not have full awareness of being useful for our own country. It was such

an inspiration that moved many people who never thought of themselves in that way.

Like his Maidan co-participants, Gregory was fully committed to rebuilding Ukrainian society. Similarly, Alex believed that change should come with future generations committed to the same cause. Orest confirmed the same belief and commitment:

I see my future in Ukraine only. My life path began here. I was captivated by the history of Ukraine. I was captivated by my grandfather. And then, there was Maidan. I hope to make change by being a lawyer, working somewhere as a prosecutor, working against corruption. I don't know if I succeed but, as they say, if you want to change anything, start with yourself.

Nikita underscored an unwavering patriotism and his dedication to social reform and activism. The experience of participating in Maidan events made him clearly realize that the only way to make a difference will be by gaining government positions and changing the system from within. His aspiration was to pursue positive change at any level he could. He was deeply concerned with the corruption in the political system. He believed in Ukraine as part of the European Union and the European culture. This belief also meant that Europe would do well to learn from Ukrainians. Nikita thought that the best form of activism was education and that activism did not have to be solely about fighting on the barricades. He stated:

Maidan taught us that people could be taken advantage of by promoting someone else's causes. Patriotism is not always about loud slogans. It can be expressed through small things. I know I cannot change the country but I can change something in Clearwater. I don't have grand plans in mind, but only small steps; I can launch discussion panels or trainings.

At the time of the present study, Nikita chaired the university's European Discussion Club and organized several meetings with local government officials. He spearheaded small group political discussions and, with his fellow students, organized the Ukrainian Students' Party, whose

ultimate goal was to be registered for the next national election.

The participants unanimously embraced the power of faith to guide their lives. When discussing faith, they often referred to their religious beliefs, although not exclusively. Faith clearly meant so much more to them than belonging to a specific denomination. For instance, Anton, admittedly not a very religious person, claimed that one needs to believe in what one does. To Anton, faith is power. He shared: "Faith, hope, and love are the three basic principles on which not only individual, but also a societal life hinges. We can do anything with love. All we need is love." The participants of the present study had big dreams and hopes for their country and for themselves as individuals, the dreams and hopes to which thousands of Ukrainians can relate.

Discussion

The present study has been evolving over several years, from its conception as an inquiry into the questions of violence after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack in the United States to investigations of other acts of violence, such as the continued Russian aggression against Ukraine in the 21st century. The initial questions I posited for such inquiries revolved around the nature of violence, its ends, and its various forms, including invasions into the sovereignty of one's country, the antidotes to violence, and ways to resist violence and resolve violent conflicts. Subsequently, the same inquiries have led me to explore the works of Arendt (1970, 1994, 1998, 2005), Collingwood (1992), and Elstain (1992, 2000, 2003). The same sources comprised theoretical discourses regarding violence and civility in their juxtaposition with personal narratives of the participants in the present study.

Arendt (1970) explored violence against the background of the 20th century and claims that it has become its common denominator. Violent events such as the continued hybrid war between Ukraine and Russia continue to make a mark on the 21st century. To Arendt, violence is "instrumental by nature" and "rational to the extent that it is effective in reaching the end that must justify it" (p. 79). Violence can be justifiable but it can never be legitimate. The practice of violence leads to a more violent world (Arendt, 1970). The results of the

present study speak to justifiable and unjustifiable forms of violence. The participants of the present study confirmed that Russia's aggression against Ukraine represents an unjustifiable and illegitimate form of violence. On the other hand, military actions undertaken by Ukraine against Russian aggression, while generally justifiable and legitimate because Ukraine had to defend its territorial integrity, may not be entirely justifiable because of the death of innocent civilians caught in the crossfire of warring sides. The participants of the present study rendered the question of justice as complex, requiring deeper insights into the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

JWT represents a litmus test for justifiable and unjustifiable forms of violence. JWT originated in pre-Christian times and has been tested through many wars over the centuries of human experience. JWT differentiates between justifiable and unjustifiable uses of organized war forces. The morality of the use of force has two parts: when it is right to resort to armed forces (concern of *jus ad bellum*) and what is right to do in using such force (concern of *jus in bello*). The most recent JWT principle is *jus post bellum*—justice of war termination and peace agreement, and trying war criminals (Elshtain, 2003). By the beginning of the 21st century, JWT “had become part of the way in which much of the world spoke of war and peace questions, especially such matters as noncombatant immunity, proportionality, and the treatment of prisoners” (Elshtain, 2003, p. 53). JWT principles are still applied in modern warfare, including discrimination, proportionality, minimal force, just cause, and right intentions. The participants of the present study unanimously agreed that Russia's aggression against Ukraine represents an unjust war.

To explicate the nature of a military conflict between Russia and Ukraine, one has to consider it as a hybrid war (Van Herpen, 2015), meaning that the war has never been officially declared by the warring sides, which makes the entire violent conflict ever more complicated. As the participants of the present study explained, it is a war but because of its undeclared status and its strategies and ends one has to wonder about its duration. To date, there are no official announcements that indicate any movement toward the resolution of the military

conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The demarcation of the war line remains murky, the lines of communication between the warring sides unknown, and the losses on both sides enormous.

All participants of the present study expressed an ultimate belief in the human reason that should prevail in resolving violent situations and in civility as an antidote to violence (Collingwood, 1992). Collingwood (1992) explored the essence and origins of civilization as a process directed towards the ideal of civility, that is the absence of force in our relations with others. Civilization is a “creation of the mind, the intellectual process of rendering something civil, or the process of becoming civil, or the state of being civil. Civilization is something which happens to a community” (p. 283). Law and order and peace and plenty are features of civilized life. The rule of law ensures justice. Collingwood's (1992) principle of social justice entails the elimination of force from one's relations with other people. The more civilized a body politic, the less economic exploitation there will be. Collingwood (1992) renders the members of ideally civilized communities as free agents who possess and exercise free will and recognize the freedom of others. Collingwood further expounded that within each civilized community, there will always be instances of non-agreements and conflicts with which we have to deal by a process leading from non-agreement to agreement.

One of the greatest outcomes of Maidan was the civil society movement that continues to take root in Ukraine (Halling & Stewart, 2015). It is worth noting that the same outcome can be regarded as paradoxical (Lyubashenko, 2014). The movement “aspires for having an influence in politics, but at the same time does not aspire for power as such” (Lyubashenko, 2014, p. 84). Shapovalova and Burlyuk (2018) claimed that Maidan protests in Ukraine revolutionized its civil society because they “led to creation of a wide network of civic activists and initiatives. They also led to civic awakening and national revival” (p. 11). This statement encapsulates the pathways of the participants in the present study to their activism and reawakening. All of them experienced the power of civic action and all of them embraced their tested beliefs in the power of collective action.

On many occasions, the participants of the present study acknowledged that they would want to be nominated and serve in their local system of governance with the purpose of serving the people and making changes based upon the charge they might have. The participants often referenced the existence of an embryonic civil society in Ukraine and their dedication to be part of the reforms necessary to rebuild civil society in the future. Given its embryonic nature, there is an apparent need for Ukrainians to revise the mission of civil society so that it corresponds to the current political context (Parandii & Jazabik, 2018).

History is not and should not be the destiny of Ukraine. Ultimately, countries are not condemned to repeat their historical cycles. Kuzio (2015) insisted that Ukraine can refrain from repeating its tragic historical destiny if it remains committed to political and economic reforms and fighting corruption. Ukraine still remains a relatively weak state with substantial economic problems (Åslund, 2015; Wilson, 2014). A root cause of Ukraine's problems has been pervasive corruption (Åslund, 2015). Since Ukraine's independence in 1991, reforms have been associated with dismantling the ruling oligarchy (Wilson, 2014). It is not surprising that the current president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky (who assumed office March 20, 2019), declared the war on corruption as one of his priorities.

Just like the participants of the present study, most Ukrainians are striving to sustain their lives and move toward a healthier and more productive society and they hold an overall optimistic view regarding the future of Ukraine and their place in it (Worschech, 2018). On the other hand, like the participants of the present study, many Ukrainians can be disappointed with the outcomes of the Maidan revolution. Revolutions often disappoint and Maidan brought to light a number of problems Ukraine continues to face today. The Kyiv protests exposed divergent perceptions of Ukraine's historical past, which in turn affect the social cohesion of contemporary Ukrainian society (Halling & Stewart, 2015). Ukraine continues to be embroiled in a hybrid war with Russia, a war that has amassed over 14,000 Ukrainian deaths to date. The military aggression from Russia threatens the very existence of Ukraine as a nation (Åslund, 2015). Tragically, an on-going

conflict in the eastern part of Ukraine makes violence not just commonplace, but also more accepted (Halling & Stewart, 2015). The participants of the present study eluded to the complexity of justifiable ends of violence and their concerns with seemingly unending and undeclared war.

So, what can Ukrainians hope for in their post-Maidan lives? What inspired the participants' activism? The participants of the present study were peaceful protesters against the corrupt regime of their government. They experienced enormous potential in the power of peaceful resistance and they never doubted their beliefs in themselves or their decision to tread the path they chose freely. In fact, when Maidan protests began in Kyiv, for the participants of the present study, it was not the question of whether, but when, to join the movement. When standing in protest in the city square for days under challenging weather conditions, the participants had come to a clear realization that something important was going on in their country and that they had to do something. Nobody promised material rewards for standing there. It was their conscience that dictated their actions. The roots of their passionate activism can be found in what Arendt (1998) calls *vita activa*: life exemplified as a synergy of thought and action and as the only truly free way of life. Fairly early in their young lives, the participants of the present study realized that it is precisely the power of collective action that can engender societal change and withstand the acts of violence.

The Maidan movement brought forth the best in people who, like the participants of the present study, dared to stand up to a corrupt regime and attempted a transformative change. The Maidan movement demonstrated the possibility for all Ukrainians to reach a consensus regarding such shared goals as reclaiming and maintaining the nation's territorial integrity and fighting corruption (Halling & Stewart, 2015). The lingering questions are yet to be answered: What is in store for Ukraine as it continues to fight for national unity and democratic reforms? Should Ukraine pursue integration with Europe, while rebuilding its economy and seeking peace with Russia? The participants of the present study expressed an unwavering hope for a better future for their country and

faith in themselves as a new generation of actors capable of making a difference. They believed in the power of people that keeps their communities in existence and moves individuals to work toward constructive goals, as Arendt (1970) would have it, the same power that can resist violence in all its forms and disguises.

For a minute, let us pause and ask simple and yet profound existential questions, just as the participants of the present study did: What does it mean and take to be a decent human being when confronting unpredictable and threatening circumstances of one's life? What makes one sustain one's humanity and be capable of constructive action? The following Arendt (1970) quote eloquently sums up the hopes and inspirations of the participants in the present study:

The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, "natural" ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. (p. 247)

If Sorel's (1999) 20th century prophesy about the problems of violence that still remain obscure proves to be true in this day and age, should not we, as educators and public intellectuals, assume it as our moral responsibility to continue exploring these problems within the local and global contexts? What could be the source of transformation at a time of current crises that can encourage studies pertaining to confronting all and any form of violence head on? When faced with uncertainties or threats, what are we to give to others (Stanage, 1975)? Violence should not become the common denominator of our century. Even in the darkest of times, we should hope against all odds. *Contra spem spero!*

Limitations and Future Research

The present study has several limitations. First, it was limited by time. My temporary residence in Ukraine during my sabbatical research was located in a neighboring (to Chernivtsi) region, which required several long-distance trips to conduct in-person interviews and to spend time researching the topic at the university library. Second, the participants of the present

study happened to be all male students; including female participants in the present study might have had an impact on the results. Additionally, the sample could have been diversified by inviting students from other institutions located in other regions of Ukraine, specifically in the south and east of Ukraine.

Given the nature of qualitative research and the limited number of participants, the findings of the present study cannot be generalizable. Lincoln and Guba (1985; as cited in Flick, 2014) stated that "the only generalization is: there is no generalization" (p. 495). The scarcity of academic sources published in Ukrainian that analyze the Maidan events represents another limitation of the present study. At the time the present study was conducted, Ukrainian language sources featuring the Maidan events represented primarily popular press articles. Moreover, at the time the present study was conducted, there were no known to me empirical studies conducted by Ukrainian researchers who focused specifically on the Maidan events. Future research could benefit from a meta-analysis of Ukrainian scholarship on the 2013-14 Maidan events published within the past five years.

Much has changed in Ukraine since the 2013-2014 revolutionary events. A longitudinal study may be warranted in order to explore the changes that might have occurred in the present study's participants' lives. If I were to return to Ukraine, I would endeavor a similar study involving the Maidan participants in Kyiv. Additionally, opportunities may arise to conduct a mixed-methods research project in collaboration with my peers at Ukrainian universities. As the curtain falls on the stage of the present study, I cannot refrain from expressing my deepest gratitude to the participants of the present study for granting me access to their private worlds and sharing with me their innermost thoughts and feelings.

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