Playing Near the Edge:
An Analysis of Ukrainian Border Youths' Engagement with the Euromaidan

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Abstract

While citizenries' responses to sociopolitical events are often studied, how youth engage with such happenings remains unclear. This article therefore analyzes 45 texts written by individuals under the age of eighteen in three of Ukraine's regions—Zakarpattia, Volyn, and Chernihiv—following the Euromaidan of 2013-14. The study reveals the ways young Ukrainians absorbed, upheld, and (re)inscribed national narratives and discourses in light of the demonstrations and subsequent war. Though it remains uncertain whether their feelings will be sustained into the future, the paper emphasizes the wide-reaching effects of sociopolitical happenings on a country's entire population.

Keywords: youth; engagement; protests; national narratives; Ukraine; Euromaidan

"Do not see Ukraine as the land of your parents.
Look at it as the land of your children.
And then change will come..."

Svyatoslav Vakarchuk, 2014

Do preadult individuals absorb national sentiments and narratives when they live across the country from social and political events like protests and demonstrations? Can such messages shape their conceptualizations of their state and nation and, in turn, their sense of national belonging? Although these questions are critical for uncovering the impacts of exogenous socio-political events on a country's citizenry, the remarkably limited literature on youths' responses to such happenings fails to provide adequate answers.[1] Prior work has considered how various micro- and macro-level factors contribute to the development of certain attitudes, perceptions of difference/otherness, and feelings toward one's nation (see, for example, Barrett, 2005; Barrett and Davis, 2008; Blank, 2003; Dekker, Malova, and Hoogendoorn, 2003; Scourfield et al., 2006), but little research has analyzed the ways socio-political events shape young people's conceptualizations of their state and nation. David Sears and Nicholas Valentino's 1997 piece offers important insight by demonstrating that politics and political events influence preadults' opinions and worldviews, but their findings, like earlier studies on youth and politics, are framed primarily around the long-term psychosocial impacts for individuals above the age of eighteen. Hence, the effects of political happenings on young people's feelings toward their nation, and overall sense of national belonging, have typically been overlooked.

Equally understudied are the ways that young people—especially those under age eighteen— not living in the direct vicinity of political demonstrations and protests are impacted by such occurrences. As most major cities are located in the interior of states' territories, individuals of all ages living outside or great distances away from main urban centers, in rural locales, or in border regions are typically surveyed less often than those in densely populated areas, due to both accessibility challenges and population size. As such, the perspectives of preadults, and specifically those living in these situations, are regularly excluded from studies of politics and nationalism.

But while young people, as even a general category, are not often considered to be of social science interest and, at times, viewed as apolitical, the two-part 2014-15 special issue of *Global Studies of Childhood* reveals that it is through young people's engagement with nationalist discourses that ideals of the nation and good citizenship are shaped, feelings of belonging to a nation are constructed, and identifications as national citizens are framed (Beneï, 2008). Albeit understudied, the way they uphold, resist, and (re)inscribe the nation forms sensibilities about their world and themselves, as both youth and as adults, which shapes emerging notions around nationhood (Millei, 2015; Skey, 2009). Exploring how young people absorb national rhetoric and discourses around political events is therefore imperative for understanding the present and future of nation-states, as preadults will one day be responsible for (de)constructing democratic citizenries, supporting linguistically and culturally diverse societies, and policymaking at the top domestic and inter-state levels (Solano-Campos, 2015).

This paper thus seeks to fill the literary and empirical gaps in uncovering if (and how) precarious socio-political environments impact young people, particularly the ways they engage with nationalist narratives. To do so, the study draws on 45 essays and poems written by pupils between the ages of eight and seventeen in three of Ukraine's peripheral *oblasti* (regions)—Zakarpattia, Volyn, and

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[1] As the definition of 'youth' is contested, for the purpose of this paper, it is understood as individuals under the age of eighteen.

Chernihiv—following the Euromaidan of 2013-14.[2] Using texts to uncover individual responses to the Euromaidan brings a more expressive medium into the current analyses, at the same time mitigating the ethical issues that arise when conducting research with minors. Studying preadults in different border regions adds further complexity; these individuals have typically been excluded from prior studies because of their age, geographic location, and physical distance from the main protests on Kyiv's *Maidan*, or Independence Square.

The paper is hereafter divided into five sections. The first outlines the limited literature on youth and nationalism, particularly within the Ukrainian context. The second section describes the project's methodological approach by elaborating on the '*Zhytya – Tobi*' (Life – To You) contest, the texts under scrutiny, and the analytical processes used to reveal major themes. The third highlights the main findings by theme, demonstrating the ways youth engaged with national narratives around the events of 2013-14, while the fourth shows how they drew on these discourses to construct a sense of national identity and belonging. The final section discusses the study's larger significance in helping us better understand preadults' engagement with socio-political events.

Relevant Literature

Youth and the Nation

As individuals under the age of eighteen are not often considered to be of social science interest, few studies have highlighted how they conceptualize their nation and their place within it. Yet prior work shows that children only a few years old mobilize national discourses for their identifications and defining in- and out-groups (see Barrett, 2005; Beneï, 2008; Scourfield et al., 2006; Solano-Campos, 2015). Martyn Barrett (2005), for instance, suggests national identity begins to develop as early as age five, gradually gaining more importance until it is fully formed around age fifteen when adolescents understand that they belong to a certain national group. Other scholars support this claim, asserting that by middle childhood (around age ten or eleven), most individuals have geographical knowledge about their country and others, including the symbols used to represent them (Barrett and Oppenheimer, 2011). As with adults, young peoples' engagement with national discourses and narratives helps to shape their ideas about good citizenship; construct a sense of belonging to a 'homeland' or place of the nation within their 'sociospatial consciousness' (Silova et al., 2014); and form sensibilities about their world and themselves as present/future citizens (Kallio, 2014).

Still, some scholars reason that attachment to one's nation and national identification can be explained by more than maturity or cognitive development, pointing to the ways micro- and macro-level factors influence youths' attachment to, and opinions of, their state and nation. For example, Barrett and Davis (2008) argue that family, peers, schools, and mass media provide information that influences young people's identities; however, they also purport that the strength of influence depends on the quality of the relationship between youth and these variables. Howard and Gill (2001) further assert that young people use familiar experiences and narratives to construct their feelings toward their nation and appropriate their national identities, including, but not limited to, context-dependent strategies and concrete elements like symbols, stereotypes, icons, national characteristics, and language. Carrington and Short (2008) offer a similar argument and suggest cultural affiliation has a weaker influence on young people's national identifications than material and expressive aspects of culture. The concrete surface features they point to include place of birth, living or working in a certain country, and ties of consanguinity.

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[2] The Euromaidan was a series of demonstrations and civil unrest that began on November 21, 2013, on Independence Square in Kyiv in response to the Ukrainian government's decision not to sign an association agreement with the European Union and instead pursue closer ties with Russia.

On a macro-level, Thomas Blank (2003) stresses that socio-political change, including volatile socio-economic and political contexts, political unrest, economic conditions, and authoritarian regimes, are linked to psychosomatic problems and subjective anomie in young people, as well as decreases in support for their nation. Similar findings can be found in other studies as well (see Dekker, Malova, and Hoogendoorn, 2003; Wells and Stryker, 1988), and it has additionally been suggested that charismatic leaders, successful economic development, and rising geopolitical prestige can strengthen youths' national identities and opinions of their country; the opposite appears true when they feel their basic needs are not met. Taken together, these prior works offer a foundation for understanding the ways young people engage with, and construct their feelings of attachment to, their state and nation.

Ukrainian Youth and Their Nation

Whilst providing a useful starting point, these studies have mainly focused on youth in Western Europe and other more developed countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. Preadults in other regions have been greatly overlooked, particularly in the former Soviet Union and even more specifically, Ukraine. For many years, the International Social Survey (ISSP)—a study conducted among adults in 33 countries in 1995-96 and 2003-04—was the main source of empirical data from the former USSR, but its quantitative nature and exclusion of individuals below fifteen years of age has left post-Soviet youth under-researched.[3] The qualitative study of young Russians by Fran Markowitz (1999) was thus critical for beginning to fill the empirical gap in revealing that preadults uphold competing political rhetoric and discourses even without formally participating in political institutions and processes. Eugene Tartakovsky (2011) added to the discussion in asserting that the dynamic socio-economic changes that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union greatly affected the national identities of adolescents in Russia and Ukraine, but also indicated that the effects are quite complex as they resulted in both stronger and weaker identifications.

On Ukrainian youth more narrowly, Elizabeth Peacock's (2018) paper echoes Markowitz's work and shows that young people's positions on socio-political issues, and understandings of national identity, are constructed through the meanings they make around various narratives and rhetoric in mainstream society. Her 2015 study further illustrates that youths' engagement with ideologies—especially those of language—at the local, regional, national, and global levels complicate, and inform, their conceptualizations of their nation and national identities. Debra Friedman (2016) similarly emphasizes the role of language and socialization in shaping Ukrainian youths' feelings of national belonging; she underscores that speaking Ukrainian gives young people considerable scope for exercising individual agency in formulating their own understandings of their national community. In addition to these studies, micro-level factors, such as parenting, socio-economic status, family dynamics, and socialization, have been cited as significantly influencing the development of Ukrainian youths' behaviors, interactions with others, and worldviews (Burlaka, 2016; Burlaka et al., 2017; Drabick et al., 2006).

But whereas prior works have furthered the research into Ukrainian youths' engagement with their nation, the literature is still largely concentrated on young people living in major cities. There has been less attention devoted to those living away from central areas, in more rural settings, and on the cartographic peripheries of Ukraine, as is also true for post-Soviet states more generally. Yet, as Hilary Pilkington's 2012 critical research with students on the territorial margins of the post-Soviet space suggests, areas of territorial, social, and cultural separation can foster new and very different systems of interaction than those found in states' political cores. The formal and legal distinctions between polities

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[3] Many other studies have focused on Ukrainian 'youth' as individuals above eighteen years of age (see, for example, Diuk, 2013; Fournier, 2012; 2015; 2018; Krawatzek, 2017; Nikolayenko, 2011; Onuch, 2014; Topalova, 2006).

also provide for more interactions across and within state borders, allowing for greater human mobility and cultural transferability in borderland areas (Wilson and Donnan, 1998). Though not explicitly on youth, Tatiana Zhurzhenko's (2010) work also highlights how symbolic meanings and narratives in border regions, particularly between Ukraine and Russia, shape feelings of national belonging in Ukraine through the construction of neighboring states as distinct 'Others.' In this way, the geographic position of individuals living near state boundaries very much has the potential to influence their worldviews and responses to society. While it is important to recognize how individuals living in a country's core are impacted by politics, it is evidently also valuable to understand the experiences of those living in other parts of the country.

Accordingly, this project investigates the ways young people in Ukraine's borderlands engaged with the Euromaidan and subsequent war of 2013-14. The Euromaidan has been selected because it was a catalyst for great changes at both the local and national levels in Ukraine, including a new wave of Ukrainian nationalism, amplified pro-European and pro-democratic sentiments, and an increased desire to be distinct from Russia.[4] By building on previous literature, although housed in different research traditions and disciplinary fields, the paper queries whether, and how, border youth internalized the events of 2013-14, particularly the ways they engaged with nationalist narratives and discourses. In line with critical sociocultural theory, this project posits that young people are not passive receivers of stimuli (Corsaro, 2011), but political agents who actively absorb, interpret, uphold, contest, and (re)inscribe their nation (Millei, 2015; Solano-Campos, 2015). The paper draws on Marc Ross's conceptualization of narratives as ways to express, reinforce, and frame "collective memories and perceptions" (2007: 30). Acquiring meaning through the process of semiotics, narratives directly relate to the sociocultural and political milieu wherein they emerge and for the group they relate to (Ross, 2007); in the case of this paper, the nation as an "imagined political community" (Anderson, 2006: 6). Similarly, discourses—as semiotic ways of construing aspects of the world (physical, mental, or social)—reflect the unique positions and perspectives of specific groups of actors (Fairclough, 2010). National narratives and discourses thus reveal a nation's understandings, fears, motivations, and normative processes of construction and strengthening of particular events, traumatic or otherwise (Ross, 2007; also French, 2012), which are incorporated, at least temporarily, into understandings about what it means to be a member of the nation (Beneï, 2008). In exploring Ukrainian youths' engagement with national discourses and narratives associated with the Euromaidan, then, this paper offers a snapshot of how young people understood themselves and the Ukrainian nation amidst the precarious environment brought about by the events of 2013-14.

Methodological Approach

This study is based on an analysis of 45 essays and poems written by pupils between the ages of eight and seventeen in three of Ukraine's regions: Zakarpattia, Volyn, and Chernihiv (see Appendix A for ages and locales). The texts were submitted during an international literary and artistic competition called '*Zhytya –Tobi*' (Life – To You), which ran from October 25, 2014 to February 25, 2015. The contest was a collaborative project between the International Institute of Education, Culture, and Diaspora Relations (MIOK) at the Lviv Polytechnic National University and the non-governmental organization Maidan Norway, with support from Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science and Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[5] Approximately 1,500 youth under age eighteen participated in

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[4] For more, see Kulyk, 2014; 2016; Kuzio, 2015a; 2015b; Onuch, 2014; 2015; Onuch and Sasse, 2016.

[5] As the competition was conducted under the auspices of both the Ukrainian and Norwegian governments, it is unlikely that the authors were encouraged to express certain narratives or take specific positions, such as 'pro-West,' 'pro-Europe,' or 'anti-Russia.' However, it must be recognized that the sponsoring organizations, and the perceptions people hold of them, could prove influential, and thus, a contest supported by only the Ukrainian or Norwegian governments may receive a different set of entries.

the competition from all regions of Ukraine, including Crimea, and diasporic communities in Poland, Greece, France, Spain, Portugal, and Norway.

The contest was advertised on MIOK's website and in schools across Ukraine, instructing young people to creatively depict the contest's theme—what 'life' is to them—through writing or visual art.[6] Similar to earlier competitions organized by MIOK, such as '*Dlya Tebe, Ukraino*' (For You, Ukraine) in 2010, *Zhytya – Tobi* sought to identify the attitudes, opinions, and psychological states of young people—in this case, around the events of 2013-14—in order to provide recommendations to national leaders and specialists regarding support for youth in Ukraine.[7] By analyzing depictions of their lives, the contest was additionally aimed at uncovering young peoples' visions and understandings of 'European values,' 'democratic freedoms,' and 'defending the interests of the state.' Although the theme and timing of the contest lent itself to works relating to the Euromaidan and annexation of Crimea, other answers were possible, as the instructions called for submissions which "cover the main theme of the competition" and did not explicitly ask for the use of certain tones or words, or references to particular topics, people, places, or events.[8] As a diverse range of works were received by MIOK, it cannot be discerned whether the authors (or even all youth) were aware of the above goals. A panel of independent adjudicators selected 20 winners based on artistic merit, and 120 submissions have been published in a book project. The contest was therefore an analytical exercise as much as a test of Ukrainian youths' creative abilities.

While the total submissions included videos, audio recordings, paintings, and other artistic works, only essays and poems are used in this study, as a more rigorous analysis was possible by limiting the media.[9] An examination of texts also helps to reveal nuances and themes in ways not always possible with visual art pieces. Of the written works submitted by authors in Ukraine, 45 have thus been randomly selected from the materials provided by MIOK, fifteen from each region under study.[10] The texts average 1000 words in length and represent diverse genders, ages, levels of education, schools, regions, and geographic locations (including both urban and rural locales).[11] Written submissions from Zakarpattia, Volyn, and Chernihiv are the focus of this analysis because these regions are geographically situated in different directions and on Ukraine's peripheries, sharing a border with at least two neighboring states (see Figure 1). Further, none of these regions house the capital city, Kyiv, where the main Euromaidan protests took place. Following from the premise that areas of territorial and social separation foster new symbolic meanings and narratives, which can shape understandings of one's nation and identity (Pilkington, 2012; Zhurzhenko, 2010), it is expected that the youth surveyed here might thence draw on familiar narratives associated with the events of 2013-14, as well as those unique to their geographic location and influenced by the bordering states. In moving the analysis away from the country's core, the study further includes regions closer in proximity to Ukraine's neighboring states than to Kyiv, Donetsk, Luhansk, and Crimea (an exception is some parts of Chernihiv), and distinct from the regions most studied in the scholarship on Ukraine, particularly Lviv, Kyiv, Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, and Odessa.[12]

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[6] The instructions on MIOK's website encouraged submissions of prose works, poetic works, drawings, and photography. It is not known to the author how each school or teacher presented the competition to the young people and their parents.

[7] Several roundtables and presentations with government officials and specialists were held in Ukraine and Norway in 2015. Although youth are not often included in social science analyses, these actions by policymakers and grassroots organizations indicate that the socio-political importance of young people is recognized in non-academic spheres.

[8] For more on MIOK, see: http://miok.lviv.ua/.

[9] Consent to use the texts was granted through correspondences with MIOK, as they received full rights to participants' works. Future projects may consider other media, or submissions from the diaspora, but these are beyond the scope of this paper.

[10] The texts were chosen independent of the adjudicators' assessments. While this project, in some ways, is limited to literate youth, this is not to suggest that others have not also been impacted by the Euromaidan. To ensure the most accurate interpretation of the texts, including subtle nuances, two Ukrainian citizens assisted with the translations.

[11] The average age of the authors is 12.6 years. Unfortunately, neither ethnicity nor socio-economic status can be determined.

[12] MIOK's own analyses also focused on the works from the conflict zones and Ukraine's easternmost regions.

Figure 1. Map of Ukraine (Purple) with Selected Regions (Yellow) and Bordering Countries[13]

Map created by author. Shape files retrieved from DIVA-GIS.
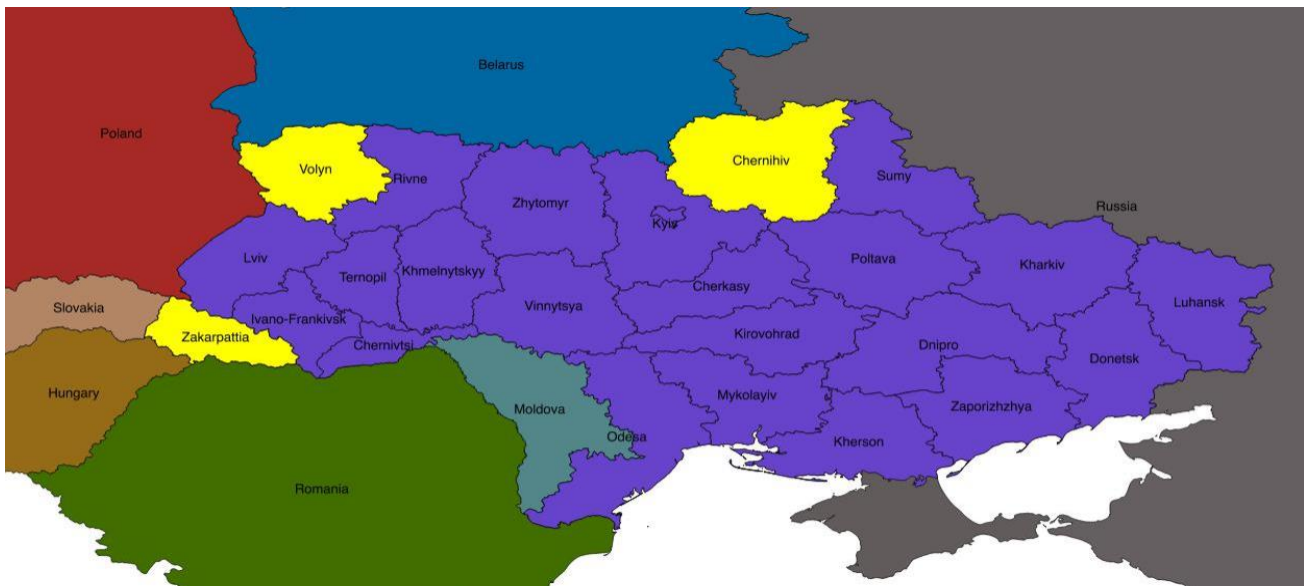
Given the random selection of the texts, and the distance between Kyiv and the regions, it is also unlikely that many, if any, authors participated in the main protests; however, it cannot entirely be excluded that the preadults attended the events or were brought by their parents, or even participated in local proxy demonstrations. The paper therefore postulates that most authors did not play an active role in the Euromaidan, but acknowledges that some may have been in Kyiv, or regional centers, during parts of the demonstrations. Whereas a larger sample might reveal further insights, the study is limited by those made available by MIOK and the number of written pieces in each region under study; Chernihiv received the most submissions of all regions bordering Russia, but this still only represented 2.6 percent of the total submitted, with many visual art pieces.[14] The sample was therefore selected so as to ensure consistency and representativeness across all regions based on what was available in Chernihiv. Whilst 45 pieces may appear relatively small when compared to the larger collection, it still allows for an in-depth analysis and affords a detailed snapshot of how young Ukrainians felt about themselves and their nation following the Euromaidan.

Inductive thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo 12 to analyze the texts and identify major themes, tropes, and sentiments.[15] This type of qualitative analysis is an exploratory, and often descriptive, approach to examine explicit and implicit meanings found in textual data through the use of themes and codes (Guest et al., 2012). In order to develop the tropes discussed in this paper, all texts were initially coded inductively for items of analytical interest that appeared more than once, including certain words, phrases, and symbolic references. The 31 smaller codes and sub-themes were then aggregated into eight larger themes based on related ideas. The four largest are discussed in the next section, as they are the most relevant for the first research question, while the theme of 'national

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[13] At the time of writing, Crimea is under Russian occupation.

[14] Although not explored further in this paper, it is noteworthy that the regions bordering Russia received significantly fewer submissions than in other parts of Ukraine. The submissions from Volyn and Zakarpattia made up 4.9 and 7.0 percent of the total, respectively.

[15] NVivo is a qualitative data analysis computer software used to organize, analyze, and explore unstructured or qualitative data. It allows the user to identify trends and cross-examine information in a multitude of ways. NVivo is used in academia, government, and the non-profit and commercial sectors, as well as across diverse fields, such as the humanities, social sciences, and business.

belonging/identity' motivates the following one in answering the study's second question.[16] Though the authors' ages may have impacted their writing, and thus the significance of some findings, the paper treats all texts as comparable to explore the different ways youths constructed meaning around the Euromaidan regardless of age.

Importantly, it cannot be guaranteed that the youths wrote their texts entirely independently of their parents or teachers, as it is plausible that schools and families encouraged pupils to submit pieces. However, the instructions clearly stated the contest was only for individuals aged seven to seventeen, and defined a participant as "the one who submits the original work of his own performance to the competition."[17] Moreover, the registration waiver required submitting participants' birthdates, contact information, and schools to determine their age, and there were no incentives for participation, financial or otherwise, aside from publication based on creative ability. If parents or teachers did assist the authors, this only reiterates that youth are incredibly sensitive to, and influenced by, the people they socialize with (Corsaro, 2011). Tartakovsky (2011) further notes that adolescents' relationships with their peers most strongly influence their national identities and feelings of attachment to their country. While this may be an age-specific phenomenon, it reinforces that youths' socialization and learning processes involve several agents (Solano-Campos, 2015), and that the sentiments found in the texts may not only reflect the perspectives of the authors, but also those of a wider preadult population not directly represented here. Since the influence of the people in the participants' lives cannot be measured nor controlled for here, the study acknowledges that the youths' views may resemble those of others, yet takes the position that they, just like adults, are active political agents.

(Re)Producing National Narratives

To explore how preadults absorb national narratives and discourses, the following section is subdivided into the four major themes found in the texts related to the events of 2013-14: 'Euromaidan,' 'war,' 'national markers,' and 'new national heroes.' As is evident below, there are overlaps across the tropes, as well as more nuances than what the larger themes suggest. Although this paper is not a comparative analysis in the traditional sense—rather an exploratory study of how youth in different parts of a country engaged with the same event—it must be noted that significant differences were not observed across the three regions. Whereas a comparison of border and non-border youths' texts, or between youth in the conflict zone and those elsewhere, may uncover considerable dissimilarities, the study's findings did not disclose the expected results based on prior studies (Pilkington, 2012; Zhurzhenko, 2010); namely, living in border regions did not appear to drastically inform, nor create differences in, the ways youth expressed their understandings of, and feelings of attachment to, the Ukrainian nation. Still, the below analysis is in line with previous literature in showing that national discourses and political rhetoric around socio-political events are internalized and commented on by young people (Markowitz, 1999; Peacock, 2018). In order to conceal the authors' identities in the discussion below, their names have been replaced by a code (i.e. Z1 for Zakarpattia author #1) and 'they' is used as a place-filler for 'he/she.'

Euromaidan

The texts clearly revealed that preadults in all three regions interpreted, absorbed, and upheld national narratives surrounding the Euromaidan. In Zakarpattia, for example, one author explicitly referenced the 'Euromaidan' (Z9), while another used the more colloquial 'Revolution of Dignity' (Z3). Other youth alluded to the movement's underlying message and aims, including mentions of the

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[16] The other larger aggregated themes include 'childhood,' 'religion,' and 'nature.' Notably, many codes overlapped across themes.

[17] For more on MIOK, see: http://miok.lviv.ua/.

desire (both theirs and the protesters') for increased European integration (Z6, Z9, Z13, Z14), aspirations for "justice" from the government (Z6), and the slogan supported by Euromaidan protesters: "Ukraine is Europe" (Z14). Authors in Volyn expressed similar sentiments and even cited the 'Euromaidan' and 'Revolution of Dignity' more often than in Zakarpattia, with one and four mentions, respectively (V1, V6, V14, and V10). The authors in this region additionally conveyed pro-European views that echoed those described above, such as "Ukraine is Europe" (V10), and a desire for Ukraine to be a "recognized European country" with a "developed economy" and "perfect legislation standing at the guard of its peoples' rights and freedom" (V9). Drawing on Ross (2007), these semantics very much point to the youths' conceptualization of the protesters as members of the Ukrainian nation, or imagined community (Anderson, 2006), with their own collective memories, perceptions, and motivations.

The submissions from Chernihiv resembled those of the other regions in that they, too, revealed an explicit connection to the Euromaidan and the Ukrainian nation's objectives (Ross, 2007). This was demonstrated by the repeated use of words like 'Europe' and 'European,' which arose 27 times in the fifteen texts, with the latter in the contexts of 'European values,' 'European future,' and 'European country.' While only one Chernihiv author directly cited the 'Revolution of Dignity' (C14), and none referenced the 'Euromaidan,' the texts included various illustrations of the protests, such as how "[p]roactive young people…took to the streets of the capital to show their disapproval of Ukraine's chosen course" (C14) and "to protest against disorder and injustice taking over the country" (C5).

The authors from all regions also expressed narratives relating to the Euromaidan through descriptions of disorder and bloodshed, particularly of protesters and others fighting for Ukraine. For example, youth in Zakarpattia depicted the atmosphere, including the "[a]gitation in the crowd" (Z1) as thousands of people stood out in the cold "creating a solid symbolic front" (Z9). Some authors vividly illustrated the violent events (Z3, Z8, Z11, Z12) through descriptions of "fire, cobblestones, and slamming guns" (Z1), "enemy bullets" hitting innocent protesters (Z5), and "armed Berkut division attacking unarmed civilians" with Molotov cocktails (Z14). The texts from Volyn mirrored those from Zakarpattia in their own overt and candid descriptions of Kyiv's turbulent environment. One example is V1's assertion that "[w]ithout a warning, snipers opened fire. They started shooting at innocent unprotected people who were part of a peaceful protest," as well as V10's illustration: "[t]he bullet went through and drew the cross he wore around his neck into the deadly wound." V1, V6, V7, and V9 also lucidly depicted aggression and brutality in the capital during the height of the protests. As V6 wrote: "[m]ore dead were just brought back from Instytutska Street. Bodies of many covered in blood and wounds. Even the earth looks crimson red, painted with blood…Everything around reminds of hell." This imagery indicates that the authors were so aware of the happenings on the Maidan that they geo-cognitively placed themselves amidst the demonstrations in their writing. Following from Fairclough (2010), the preadults used semiotics to frame, and even claim, the collective memories and perceptions of the protesters as their own, thus, emphasizing their attachment to others within the national collective. Their writings also divulge that the main site of the Euromaidan protests, as a physical place, is central to the youths' (re)imagination of the Ukrainian nation (Silova et al., 2014).

Like the others, the Chernihiv authors also situated themselves on Independence Square and, again, portrayed the importance of it for conceptualizations of the Ukrainian nation. The texts from Chernihiv portrayed the Maidan in their accounts of "overflowing flames of countless Molotov cocktails" (C6); the government's "daring, frank cruelty, resulting in activists being arrested, kidnapped, tortured, [and] their cars burnt" (C14); and the determination of the protesters, who "straightened out their blistered backs" only to be "slaughtered" (C8). Violence was neither omitted in the texts from this region: "[a] few men on the front line stood strong, defending their positions and

fighting the enemy as best as they could. I glanced over and saw Vas'ko—unconscious on the ground, receiving heavy blows from the attackers. They kicked his pale and bloody face, the agile ones would swing their batons, chasing and hunting down unarmed activists, like animals" (C6). Although not described here, C10, C11, and C14 also illustrated scenes resembling those above. Through this candid and real-time commentary, it can be seen that youth from all regions internalized and (re)produced similar narratives. In doing so, and in line with Ross (2007), they normatively framed the events, and the actors, in a particular way so as reflect the perspective of the larger nation.

War

The preadults further revealed their engagement with narratives associated with the events of 2013-14 through their illustrations of the war in Eastern Ukraine. As with the Maidan, several authors also geo-cognitively positioned themselves in Donbas amongst the individuals fighting for Ukraine. By doing so, the young people showed that they had similarly absorbed the national collective's memories and experiences from the battlefront. This was exemplified most often in the texts from Zakarpattia and Volyn. In Zakarpattia, a clear demonstration is the quote from Z10's piece: "I see our own children in battle [a]s they lose their lives," as well as Z9's depiction of the war: "our soldiers are fighting back. Artillery fires everywhere…People are screaming, there are many wounded, death is lurking everywhere." The "nightmare" in Eastern Ukraine was additionally revealed by Z13, who described "gun shots, explosions, destruction everywhere,… projectiles, and destroyed military equipment,…attacks on Ukrainian defenders,… [and] the wounding and killings of military men and civilians." Imagery resembling the above was also found in the texts by Z6 and Z10.

Vivid details of the war could likewise be seen in the Volyn texts. The authors who referenced the conflict (specifically V1, V2, V3, V5, V6, V10, V11, V14, V15) illustrated scenes resembling those in V11's essay: "[f]ragments went flying everywhere…The moaning of those wounded was drowning in the roaring of the cannons." Notably, when discussing war, the Volyn youth expressed more mixed sentiments than their counterparts in other regions. For instance, V1's and V12's pieces centered on the associated sadness and pain: "the numbers of those killed and ruined cities will forever be carved into my memory…I will forever feel the pain of unhealed wounds" and "she touched each of the five bullet holes that took away that which she cherished most. This one went into his heart. This one, this burglar, stole her hope." These feelings were also portrayed in the texts by V3, V4, V6, V7, and V8. At other times, though, the Volyn authors conveyed less sorrow and more support for the war efforts and their determination to overcome the 'enemy.'[18] The following lines demonstrate these attitudes: "war has united us all and made us stronger" (V15), "we are not going to retreat" (V14), and "I will not repent before you, Muscovites, nor will I let you take Ukraine!" (V11).

Like the Volyn authors, those in Chernihiv also demonstrated their awareness of the conflict. C5, for example, stated: "[I] was always thinking about the East—about the people living there, about the gunshots, about the death." The Chernihiv youths moreover asserted the need to protect Ukraine (C2, C5, C6, C7, C10, C13, C14), and their support for the Ukrainian soldiers fighting in Donbas (C3, C4, C7, C8). Other authors, such as C8, explicitly discussed the sorrow Ukrainians felt seeing their loved ones return from war in coffins. Taken together, the texts reveal that the conflict greatly affected Ukrainian youth, even though they did not actively participate. The lexical and emphatical distinctions between the imagined in- ('we') and out- ('they'/'enemy'/'Muscovites') groups further implies that the authors' views followed from their own understanding of themselves as members of the Ukrainian nation under attack by the out-group (Anderson, 2006; Beneï, 2008; Millei, 2015).

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[18] The 'enemy' was described at different times as Muscovites, Viktor Yanukovych's (previous) government, the Berkut, and any others who injured and/or killed protesters during the Euromaidan.

Unlike the other two regions, the Chernihiv authors also placed significant emphasis on birds, and specifically the falcon, when describing those who defended their nation in war. This was observed in the texts by C3, C7, C10, C13, and C14; for example, C14 noted that falcons are "birds who strive for freedom" by "defending" their territory and "battling the enemy." The same author used 'falcon,' 'Cossack,' and 'hero' interchangeably throughout their text, thus, suggesting the terms are synonymous and representative of someone who is "brave," a "gifter of hope," and "an eternal symbol" of those who sacrificed their lives.[19] C13 expressed related sentiments in their use of 'falcons' in place of 'soldiers:' "[c]ome back alive, our dearest falcons, [y]our mothers wait for you at home." Although not as frequent, authors in other regions used birds as symbols too. For example, V9, discussed cranes returning home after a sorrowful leaving. While birds may appear misplaced, the old Ukrainian folk song, '*Plyve Kacha Po Tycyni*' is now connected with the Euromaidan; translating to 'the duckling swims,' the traditional song is a dialogue between a mother and soldier son, and has acquired new meaning to commemorate those who died during the demonstrations. The references to birds is likely not a coincidence, then, but pays homage to the writing style of Ukrainian folklore (Popson, 2001) and highlights the youths' use of familiar rhetoric and symbols in understanding their nation (Carrington and Short, 2008; Kallio, 2014; Peacock, 2018). It must also be noted that the symbol of Chernihiv is an eagle, and hence, its presence additionally shows the authors' use of context-dependent elements in constructing their senses of national belonging (Howard and Gill, 2001; Zhurzhenko, 2010).

National Markers

The many mentions of national symbols and markers further exemplify how the youth upheld and (re)inscribed national narratives in their writing. Tangible aspects of the nation cited include: the Ukrainian flag (C2, C6, C12, V6, V9, V11, V12, V15, Z14); Ukraine's colors, blue and yellow (C2, C6, C12, V1, V11, V12, V15, Z9, Z14); and the Ukrainian anthem (C6, V6, V9, V10, Z9, Z13, Z14).[20] Though not every author overtly connected these symbols to the Euromaidan, many used them when discussing the events of 2013-14. For instance, Z9 emphasized that a new "blue and yellow nation" arose from the demonstrations, and V6 stated that the national flag is a Ukrainian's "most valued possession." The anthem was also regularly emphasized by preadults; in Chernihiv, for example, the only author who cited the anthem did so when describing the burial of a soldier. Authors in both Volyn and Zakarpattia (V1, V9, Z9) additionally stated that the Ukrainian nation's perseverance on the Maidan demonstrates the truth in the anthem's words, "the glory and freedom of Ukraine has not yet perished." Others pushed this point further to suggest that the true heroes referenced in the anthem— those who laid their souls and bodies down for Ukraine—are modern day Ukrainians, particularly the *Nebesna Sotnya* (Heavenly Hundred, referring to the protesters who died on Independence Square) and the ATO soldiers fighting in the East (V6, V10).[21]

The young people in all regions also cited national heroes when writing about their lives, such as Ukraine's freedom-fighting Cossacks (C10, C14, V1, V3, V9, V11, Z9, Z12, Z14) and famous Ukrainian writers like Taras Shevchenko (C1, C2, C13, C14, V6, Z1, Z13), Lesia Ukrainka (C14, V2), and Ivan Franko (C14, Z1). When referencing these historical figures, some authors emphasized their explicit similarities with modern Ukrainians, as was exemplified in Z12's piece: "the Cossacks fought for independence [in the olden days], and today—it is all Ukrainians." C1 and V6 further illuminated the lessons learned from the past in asserting that contemporary Ukrainians will be guided toward the

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[19] The Cossacks were a group of self-governing, semi-military communities who defended Ukraine's population during various invasions from the fifteenth century until World War II. They have become a Ukrainian national symbol as fearless and courageous warriors.

[20] It is noteworthy that Ukraine's coat of arms symbol, the *tryzub* (trident), was not cited in any texts.

[21] The 'Heavenly Hundred' is the colloquial name of the first one hundred people killed during the Euromaidan by the Berkut (Ukrainian Special Forces) and government snipers. 'ATO soldiers' refers to the soldiers involved in Ukraine's Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO), which was launched in 2014 by the Ukrainian Security Service against separatist and terrorists movements in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Both Ukrainian military personnel and volunteer battalions have participated in the operation.

ultimate victory of independence, democracy, and a high standard of life if they follow Taras Shevchenko's words, "[f]ight and you will win."

Yet, not all youth created such a stark ontological divide between the historic and modern. Particularly striking examples include Z9's claim that Ukrainians are "of Cossack descent after all," which was similarly stated by V3 in their text, and Z1's assertion that, "I have faith in my great nation, [t]he people of Shevchenko and Franko." In describing the national heroes who historically fought, and sacrificed their lives, for Ukraine, many authors concluded that this same "noble" (V11) and "freedom-seeking Cossack spirit" (C14) is needed to protect the country again (V9). When taken together, the above findings indicate that the events of 2013-14 inspired youth to reflect on, and reproduce, national icons and symbols from both the distant and not-so-distant past (French, 2012; Howard and Gill, 2001). Moreover, it appears that they used this process of semiotics to place and make sense of themselves, as well as find meaning, within the dynamic socio-political milieu brought about by the Euromaidan.

New National Heroes
Discussions around the Euromaidan and war in eastern Ukraine also included narratives about other national heroes, particularly the 'Heavenly Hundred.' In fact, texts from all regions suggested that the Heavenly Hundred are new national heroes, who will forever be remembered as "innocent people who gave up their lives for [Ukrainians'] freedom and independence" (V1). While many authors implicitly offered a similar argument (seen in the texts by C11, C12, C14, V4, V6, V10, V13, Z1, Z3, Z5, Z9, Z10, Z13, Z14), this claim was explicitly reinforced by V13 in stating, "[n]o one will ever again bring [Ukraine] to its knees: this new country is built on the bones of the Heavenly Hundred!" When citing the sacrifices made by the Heavenly Hundred, several authors also wrote about the sadness that followed their deaths. For example, C14 asserted that "the Heavenly Hundred were mourned not only by widows, parents left with no children, and orphans—all of Ukraine shed tears for them." Notably, this Chernihiv author did not suggest differences in how these individuals were grieved across the country. The following quote from a Zakarpattia piece further echoes this nationwide grief: "[t]hey fell in a fight for their country, [i]n a duel of force unmatched. What wrong did they do, for what sin, [d]id they pay the price with their souls?" (Z10). Drawing from previous literature (Ross, 2007; Solano-Campos, 2015), the presence of the Heavenly Hundred in the texts, including simply their colloquial name, again signals that the youth absorbed national rhetoric and internalized grief and trauma through their own interpretation of the events (Markowitz, 1999; Peacock, 2018).

Furthermore, the significance placed on the Heavenly Hundred—as demonstrated by the sheer number of references to their martyrdom—suggests that the preadults attributed meaning to these individuals in ways similar to other national symbols, particularly the aforementioned Cossacks. In fact, the youth repeatedly described the Heavenly Hundred and Cossacks using similar words like 'noble,' 'trustworthy,' and 'leader' (C10, V3, V11, Z9, Z12, Z14), and as 'courageous' individuals and 'heroes' (C11, C12, C14, V1, V4, V6, V13, Z1, Z3, Z5, Z9, Z10, Z13, Z14) who "sacrificed their lives" for Ukraine (Z3). The Ukrainian adage, 'Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the Heroes!' was also referenced in all regions when referring to the Cossacks and the Heavenly Hundred (C6, C12, V3, V4, V5, V11, Z13, Z14).[22] As was stated: they are all heroes who will "forever [be] carved into the history of [Ukrainians'] hearts" (V1). It is noteworthy that the youth did not extend this link to other modern-

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[22] This slogan is a reference to the OUN/UPA era. The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) was a radical far-right Ukrainian political organization founded in 1929 for the establishment of an independent Ukrainian state. The OUN split into two fractions in 1938: more moderate, OUN-M, and more radical, OUN-B. The OUN-B later created the Ukrainian Insurgence Arm (UPA). Although the phrase, *'Slava Ukrayini* (Glory to Ukraine),' first appeared in military formations during the Ukrainian War of Independence (1917-1921), the modern response '*Heroyam Slava* (Glory to the Heroes)' was used by members of the OUN and UPA in the 1930s as a sign of respect for all who died protecting Ukraine. The slogan became a common patriotic slogan after Ukraine's independence in 1991. While the slogan was cited in the texts, there were no mentions of these groups, despite the fact that they also participated in the Euromaidan.

day groups who might resemble the Cossacks, such as Ukrainian military personnel, or to other people who, like the Heavenly Hundred, had been peaceful protesters.

While it is relatively unsurprising that the authors cited the Cossacks—they are a prominent symbol in Ukrainian literature and folklore, and youth likely learn about these figures in school and/or are exposed to them in other ways, even if unconsciously (Popson, 2001)—the reconstruction of the historical freedom-fighter narrative in modern times is in line with national discourses in Ukraine during and following the Euromaidan. The 28 mentions of the Heavenly Hundred in the 45 texts (which translates to an appearance in approximately 62 percent of the pieces) further imply that the youth understood the significance of the symbol for their nation in 2013-14. Although this is not the only instance when they showed an understanding of national discourses, this example reinforces that the ways youth internalized the precarious events of 2013-14 might not always appear obvious.

Constructing National Belonging

In engaging with national narratives around the Euromaidan and subsequent war, the texts implicitly point to the overarching theme of national belonging. Frequent references in the youths' texts characterized Ukrainians as people who are brave or dedicated (C1, C2, C3, C4, C6, C8, C10, C12, C13, C14, V2, V4, V6, V9, V10, V14, Z7, Z8, Z9, Z12, Z13), hard-working and strong (V1, V2, V4, V6, V7, V9, V11, V12, V13, V14, Z2, Z3, Z6, Z9, Z10, Z11, Z12, Z13); and willing to defend their country (Z2, Z8, Z11, Z14). A clear demonstration is V1's statement that "Ukrainians will time and time again demonstrate their strength…[T]he whole world will eventually learn about the unbreakable will of our people." Importantly, the young people's conceptualizations of contemporary Ukrainians very much resemble those of the national heroes discussed earlier, particularly the Cossacks and Heavenly Hundred (C1, C5, C6, C8, C14, V11, V14, Z3, Z5, Z6, Z9, Z12, Z13). One author even overtly highlighted this connection in stating that there are "countless examples in history books" of Ukrainians overcoming any obstacle necessary to better their lives and those of their loved ones (Z13). Additionally, Z3 stated that "Ukrainian people have always lived honest. They gave up their lives for freedom and honor." Such sentiments suggest that the preadults view contemporary Ukrainians as comparable to past icons, for they, too, have loved, fought for, and saved the Ukrainian nation (this link was explicitly made in C2, C10, C12, V9, V15).

The notion of Ukrainians as 'heroes' was also used frequently (42 times in the 45 texts) when discussing the events of 2013-14 (cited by C3, C6, C12, C14, V1, V2, V3, V4, V6, V8, V10, V11, V13, V14, Z2, Z3, Z5, Z11, Z13, Z14). While many references were in relation to the slogan 'Glory to the Heroes!' (C2, C6, C12, V3, V4, Z14), some young people wrote about heroes as all people who sacrificed their lives on the Maidan or in the war "for others to have a chance at life" (V1, but also suggested by C14). One young person additionally explained that their father was "a hero, one of the Heavenly Hundred, and a father like that deserved a brave [child]" (V13). It must be noted that this was not the only instance wherein an author revealed that their father actively participated in the Euromaidan or the war (also C4, V5, V8, V14, V10, V11, Z14). In other cases, the youth divulged their siblings' involvement (C10, C14, Z2, Z8, Z9, Z10, Z13); for example, Z2 stated, "[m]y brother is a soldier." The use of 'hero' therefore points to the authors' perceptions of the actors involved in the events of 2013-14, including their relatives, as analogous to historical 'heroic' protagonists (Ross, 2007). These sentiments further denote Ukrainian youths' awareness of past tragedies and attachment to their fellow citizenry—findings which might be expected from adults who have lived through socio-political turmoil, but not necessarily someone under the age of eighteen.

The texts further divulged the youths' attachment to their country. This was evidenced by the recurrent use of terms like 'Motherland' and 'Fatherland' (24 references in the 45 texts), most often when describing the violence on the Maidan and the war. For instance, it was asserted that Ukrainians need to "elevate [their] Motherland to a new level" (V1) as the country is "withering… [and] being destroyed" (Z6). Although the preadults are likely well-acquainted with these terms as they are present in much Ukrainian folklore—including in works by the cited writers (Shevchenko, Franko, and Lesia Ukrainka)—the reproduction of a familiar syntax in this context indicates that they acknowledge the importance of their national homeland (Howard and Gill, 2001; Silova et al., 2014). Attachment to Ukraine is additionally reinforced by the fact that the authors' home regions did not appear to drastically influence how they engaged with national narratives around the Euromaidan. In fact, only five of the 45 authors mentioned their oblast—C5 and C14 in Chernihiv, Z14 in Zakarpattia, and V2 and V10 in Volyn—and only one referred to their general direction within the country: "I live in the West of Ukraine" (V14). Moreover, no one cited neighboring countries, or external states at all, aside from Russia and the 'West.'[23] At the same time, authors from all regions discussed territorial divides within Ukraine—though not necessarily consciously—by juxtaposing the conflict and violence in Eastern Ukraine to peace in other areas, particularly their home oblast (C4, C5, V2, V5, V6, V6, V9, V10, V11, V12, V14, V15, Z6, Z9, Z12, Z13, Z14, Z15). As these findings suggest, the youths' geographic location within Ukraine, and distance from both the Euromaidan and war, did not appear to significantly motivate their writing and had little, if any, bearing on how they internalized national narratives. While it cannot conclusively be discerned whether the authors feel more attached to Ukraine because of the events of 2013-14, at the very least, the socio-political climate heightened the youths' 'sociospatial consciousness' of Ukraine (Silova et al., 2014), even only temporarily, in instilling particular places with symbolic national meaning, particularly the Maidan and Donbas.

Several texts also made mention of the Ukrainian language as an important element of national belonging. As language ideologies have been cited as complicating and informing Ukrainian youths' conceptualizations of their nation (Peacock, 2015; Friedman, 2016), it would be expected that Ukrainian was used to express the preadults' love for their nation and homeland; however, the texts were written in a combination of Russian and Ukrainian. One author even referenced Surzhyk—a language mix of Russian and Ukrainian—when describing how Ukrainians often switch between languages when in different contexts and interacting with different people (V11). These sentiments, and the language choices more generally, suggest that the Ukrainian language gives young people agency to express attachment to the Ukrainian nation (Friedman, 2016), but does not necessarily inform, nor is it a necessary or determining condition for, national belonging. Furthermore, using Russian or Surzhyk does not appear to make someone less 'Ukrainian,' as it was cited that "Ukraine can be loved in different languages" (C14).

It must be stated that not every preadult referenced the events of 2013-14 in their texts. Two youth in Chernihiv, for example, wrote literary pieces about why they love being Ukrainian and their worries about growing older (C9, C15). Notably, national narratives were still mobilized in C15's texts, albeit not directly associated with the Euromaidan, as seen through references to ancestral lands, the Ukrainian language, and Ukraine's steppes. In line with Silova et al. (2014), these discursive constructions of landscapes and 'homeland' are instilled with symbolic meanings and again demonstrate the authors' (re)inscription of their nation. Of the other 43 texts, the above analysis highlighted differences in the level of detail used to describe, and emphasis placed on, the Euromaidan

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[23] The 'West' was never defined, but illustrated as someone (or something) that helped and supported Ukraine (Z14). Conversely, Russia was described as Ukraine's only unfriendly neighbor (Z6), the "enemy" (Z3) and an "assailant" (V12, Z10). Interestingly, Russia was only mentioned in Zakarpattia and Volyn—regions that do not share a border with Russia, whilst the 'West' was only mentioned once in Zakarpattia, a region that borders four European Union countries.

and war in eastern Ukraine. These findings suggest that the events of 2013-14 were internalized by Ukrainian youth in similar, but not identical, ways. This variance is not necessarily the result of the authors' location or distance from the events, but as was suggested in previous studies (for example, Tartakovsky, 2011), is likely related to a combination of other factors as well, such as age, gender, education, personal connection to the events, and access to information.[24]

The last point is particularly important, as it remains unclear exactly where Ukrainian border youth accessed and absorbed the messages they (re)produced in writing. The most influential transmitters of information mentioned in the texts appear to be those suggested by Barrett and Davis (2008), such as television (C5, V14, Z12, Z13, Z14), school and teachers (C5, V14, Z6), the Internet (C5, Z14), and family members, including parents (C5, V14, Z14). For example, one author wrote: "mom would spend her nights glued to the TV screen, religiously watching TSN….Later, [they] learnt that many people took it to the streets of Kyiv, and then other cities, to protest against disorder and injustice taking over the country" (C5). Nonetheless, the paper acknowledges that access and exposure to national discourses does not necessarily equate to youths' understanding of these messages. In fact, terms such as 'freedom' and 'Europe' were mentioned in pieces from all regions, but it cannot be concluded that all youth made meaning around these concepts, rather than merely parroting the adults in their lives. One author even overtly alluded to their lack of understanding: "[w]e hear so much information from all around, but according to our parents, often it is untrue. Following the situation on TV, there are, of course, things we do not fully understand" (Z14). While the contest encouraged submissions demonstrating independent thought, it is therefore likely that the youth also replicated details and messages from the individuals in their micro-sphere, as would be the same for adults. As such, the findings support that preadults are active agents in their own socialization and learning processes (Corsaro, 2011), but also draw on discourses and narratives in their own ways and through interactions with others to construct their understandings of national belonging (Millei, 2015).

Concluding Thoughts

In answering whether preadults internalize national narratives associated with major socio-political events, the paper is clear; albeit under the age of eighteen, and living in Ukraine's borderlands, the young people still very much absorbed the national discourses related to the events of 2013-14. The ways the authors upheld, resisted, and (re)inscribed these messages when writing about their lives further reveals the relevance of political rhetoric for young people in shaping their understandings of national belonging (Millei, 2015; Skey, 2009). As the paper has shown, there does not appear to be significant differences in how the events were internalized by preadults in the different border regions, nor did living in a borderland particularly influence their engagement with the Euromaidan and subsequent war or national-level narratives of Ukrainian identity.

Importantly, limitations exist on what can be extrapolated from this analysis about national identity construction, as the paper offers only a snapshot of how the Ukrainian nation was understood by youth in the three regions immediately following the events. Given Ukraine's instability in 2013 and 2014, it also cannot be discerned whether the findings are durable sentiments about national belonging indicative of nation-building processes broadly understood, or if the preadults' expressions of national identity and belonging will last into the future. But even while the ways youth felt about themselves and their nation in light of the demonstrations may, and likely will, change over time, the authors' cognitive-emotive abilities to align with, and see themselves as part of, the Ukrainian nation still suggests they intrinsically recognize its importance (Barrett, 2005; Beneï, 2008). Some preadults even

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[24] Further research could thus consider the significance of these variables, especially the differences based on age.

explicitly alluded to their own role in shaping Ukraine's future; Z15, for instance, asserted, "I worry a lot about the situation in our country, and often think how I can help," and V7 acknowledged that youth are the "forerunners of the new century." Consequently, although the study's findings may not be affirmative, or even necessary, indicators of nation-building processes in Ukraine going forward, they demonstrate that the country's youngest generation is very much aware of, and engaging with, national narratives—a reality that is critical for Ukraine's future as conflict persists in its easternmost regions.

Moreover, the paper's insights have significance beyond Ukraine, and could prove particularly useful for understanding how preadults in other post-Soviet countries engage with socio-political phenomena. Although generalizations cannot conclusively be applied due to Ukraine's unique context, the findings reinforce that young people contribute to, and shape, emerging notions around nationhood. As several post-Soviet states are still experiencing major socio-political changes following the collapse of the USSR, recognizing that youth absorb and uphold national rhetoric without formally participating in politics, and in ways not always recognized, may prove integral for the future of these nations, especially where nation-building processes are ongoing. While the importance of this age cohort is often overlooked in studies of nationalism and politics, this analysis of Ukrainian youth thus reminds us that a country's entire population is impacted by socio-political happenings, even those who are only eight years old.

Though beyond the scope of this paper, future analyses could hence consider how adults' perceptions of, and reactions to, politics shape the opinions of youth. As trauma was also prevalent in many texts, further investigations could continue the work of MIOK in studying how tumultuous events, like the Euromaidan and subsequent war, were (and continue to be) internalized by young people. The striking details of the Maidan and war in the texts also suggest the need for a deeper and more nuanced examination of what the permeation of conflict in the lives of youth will mean for the future of Ukraine and other post-Soviet states facing internal conflict and volatility. For the purpose of this paper, though, it seems fitting to conclude that the Euromaidan and subsequent war overwhelmed many, regardless of age, distance, or geographic location. As such, the only separation between Ukrainian border youth and the events of 2013-14 appears to be that of physical space.

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Appendix A. Metadata for Selected Texts.

	Zakarpattia			Volyn			Chernihiv	
Code	Age (As of Competition)	Locale	Code	Age (As of Competition)	Locale	Code	Age (As of Competition)	Locale
Z1	12 years	Svaliava	V1	13 years	Lutsk	C1	15 years	Chernihiv
Z2	10 years	Horbky	V2	13 years	Lutsk	C2	14 years	Borzna
Z3	13 years	Veliky Komyati	V3	14 years	Lutsk	C3	15 years	Chernihiv
Z4	14 years	Hanychi	V4	13 years	Pidtsyr'ya	C4	16 years	Chernihiv
Z5	14 years	Hanychi	V5	13 years	Muravysche	C5	8 years	Chernihiv
Z6	9 years	Oleshnyk	V6	14 years	Lutsk	C6	17 years	Chernihiv
Z7	13 years	Rososh	V7	14 years	Khobultova	C7	12 years	Bovrovystia
Z8	10 years	Chepa	V8	16 years	Samaru	C8	9 years	Loska
Z9	10 years	Vynohradiv	V9	16 years	Pidtsyrya	C9	15 years	Chernihiv
Z10	13 years	Shyroke	V10	16 years	Lyubyaz'	C10	15 years	Chernihiv
Z11	10 years	Tiachiv	V11	16 years	Samary-Orikhovi	C11	13 years	Chernihiv
Z12	10 years	Novoselytsia	V12	15 years	Samary-Orikhovi	C12	9 years	Chernihiv
Z13	10 years	Han'kovytsya	V13	15 years	Derevok	C13	9 years	Krasnyy Kolyadyn
Z14	16 years	Pryborzhavs'ke	V14	12 years	Ovadne	C14	14 years	Chernihiv
Z15	12 years	Fanchykovo	V15	14 years	Uhrynychi	C15	12 years	Borovystia