

DEFENDING UKRAINE AT THE REAR OF THE ARMED CONFLICT IN DONBAS: WARTIME VIGILANTISM IN ODESA (2014–2018)

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This article analyzes the phenomenon of vigilantism in Odesa, at the rear of the war in Donbas and in the context of a radical redeployment of the Ukrainian state and a redistribution of violence between state and nonstate actors. This analysis is threefold. The first part provides a sociological account of vigilante groups and their members' social backgrounds. It argues that vigilantism in Odesa has attracted people from four social backgrounds (businessmen, former combatants or security officers, far-right activists, and young people), relies on force-based actions, and implies an intense socialization of vigilantes' bodies into the use of weapons and combat sports. The second part presents the three social roles of vigilantes—as national community guards, patrolling agents, and justice makers—and explores their associated practices. It shows that an apparently disinterested promotion of public good by vigilantes (security, order, justice) sometimes turns out to be for the benefit of private interests. The third part explores the complex relationship—fluctuating from numerous exchanges of services to a direct confrontation—between vigilante groups and local political and economic elites. Finally, this article argues that the ongoing war has increased the value of vigilantes' paramilitary resources and has provided them with a large measure of social recognition as a necessary and acceptable response to the armed conflict and its hybrid threats. However, this does not exclude public controversies around vigilantism and questions concerning the challenges it represents for the Ukrainian state. This article draws on anthropological approaches to vigilantism, as well as the sociology of violence and crisis situations (political crises, revolutions, intrastate wars); it relies on a combination of primary ethnographic research and secondary materials.

Keywords: Vigilantism; Sociology of Violence; War in Donbas; Odesa, Ukraine

Pishchana, a small village in Balts'kyi District, in the northeast of Odesa Oblast. On a late evening in October 2016 a local community meeting takes place at Pishchana's House of Culture. A young man in black paramilitary clothes officiates before an audience of around 100 people: "One of your community members reported to us a case of injustice that had been committed against him. He was stripped of his land ownership. We are here to listen to all the protagonists and to restore justice." Some other young

men—all dressed in black military attire, with military canvas bags and walkie-talkies—are sitting in the meeting room. Some of their colleagues are standing guard at the entrance to the House of Culture as if ready to respond in the event of an “enemy” attack.

Close to the chief vigilante stands the head of the local administration, who defends the community and its patriotic activities: “Several of our guys are serving on the frontlines in Donbas. We all help them by collecting funds and goods for their military units. We also care about our people in the village. There are no conflicts with land ownership. The complainant is trying to manipulate you.” Other residents, including local elected officials, take the floor and repeat the same reassuring message. A policeman is present in the audience, without intervening in the meeting. Only once a voice from the audience raises the question that is probably on everybody’s lips but no one dares to ask: “Guys, who are you? What state authority do you represent? Are you the police? Why are we giving you account of our local affairs? Why do you come here so late at night and in such a manner, scaring people?”

The chief vigilante explains one more time that they are from Odesa’s Azov Civil Corps (later that same month it was rebranded under the name National Corps and registered as a political party) and that they are here to restore justice. The meeting with its arguments and counterarguments resumes, the audience implicitly recognizing the authority of vigilantes. At the end, the vigilantes identify some other problems within the community: public access to a pond that has been privatized by someone; a local schoolteacher insulting parents and openly expressing pro-Russian opinions. They briefly speak with the teacher and admonish her for her behavior in wartime. They also tear down the fence that blocked access to the pond. They give an interview about their intervention to journalists from a local TV station who came to Pishchana with them. And then they drive away. As for the land ownership dispute, they decide to abandon the case as too difficult to defend from a legal point of view.¹

The scene described above draws the contours of the phenomenon of vigilantism that gained ground in Ukraine throughout the winter of the 2013–2014 Maidan protest movement (Onuch and Sasse 2016; Shukan 2016; Minakov 2018) and developed further in the spring of 2014, gaining in scope, taking on new organizational forms, and expanding its repertoires of action in response to a pro-Russian protest mobilization in the southeast and then to the war in Donbas. This sequence also offers a glimpse of the styles of Ukrainian vigilantes and the practices they implement that are largely determined by the ongoing war and its hybrid character, consisting of multiple forms of Russian intervention and elements of civil war (Umland 2016; Malyarenko and Wolff 2018, 2019). Finally, the Pishchana episode also sketches the relationship vigilantes maintain with the state apparatus (such as local authorities or police). This article will address these three points having first placed the phenomenon of vigilantism in its recent historical context.

¹ Author’s field observations, October 2016.

VIGILANTISM ON MAIDAN

With the occupation of Independence Square (Maidan) in Kyiv in early December 2013 the protest movement not only challenged the legitimacy of President Viktor Yanukovich but also largely contributed to an erosion of the state's authority, altering the general distribution of violence (or threat of violence) between state and nonstate actors. Indeed, from its very beginning the Maidan became, in Charles Tilly's terms, a "revolutionary situation," where two distinct blocs—the Yanukovich government and the opposition—made "incompatible claims to control the state" (Tilly 1978:126), both benefiting from the support of significant portions of the population. The government tried on numerous occasions to forcefully remove the peaceful mobilization in Kyiv by using Berkut, Ukraine's special antiriot police force. It also delegated violence to private agents (*titushki*), who had been authorized to use force against Maidan supporters under the cover of the police (Goujon and Shukan 2015). These unsuccessful attempts to violently suppress the regime's opponents convinced the protestors that the state was incapable of protecting them and pushed them to self-organize in defense groups first in Kyiv, with the emergence of Self-Defense of Maidan (Samooborona Maïdanu) in mid-December 2013, and later on in other cities involved in protests.

The first clashes between the police and protestors, who in turn resorted to violent methods, which broke out on Hrushevs'kogo Street in Kyiv on January 19, 2014, reinforced the revolutionary situation of multiple competing sovereignties in Ukraine as they were followed by the seizure of government offices by citizens in western and central Ukraine (Kudelia 2017). These events also exposed the extreme fragility of the Ukrainian state, its security apparatus, and Yanukovich's grip on them. This fragility had its origins in a permanent state capture by competing groups of politico-economic elites (Åslund 2015; Konończuk 2016) and had brought ordinary citizens, long before the Maidan protests, to perceive their state as corrupt, unjust, and ineffective in carrying out its main functions (KIIS 2015).

The unprecedented sequence of deadly violence on and around Maidan on February 18–20 dealt the final blow to the state and its claim over the legitimate and monopolistic use of force and law enforcement. Special police units deployed in Kyiv defected and returned to their regional bases on February 20. Traffic police (DAI) deserted the streets of the capital and self-defense units replaced them for about a week by taking charge of the security of public buildings in the city center or by patrolling the streets.²

The breakup of the Yanukovich regime and the forcible transfer of power in Kyiv to its opponents also raised the question of the new government's legitimacy, especially in southeastern regions where Maidan had low popular support—and thus the question of the new government's capacity to restore state authority, to provide security, and to effectively enforce order. Indeed, in these regions the law-enforcement agencies, mainly the police force, suffered defections and lacked loyalty toward the government in Kyiv. They stood back during the counterrevolutionary mobilizations

² Author's field observations, February–March 2014.

in March–April 2014 in Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhans'k, Mykolayiv, and Odesa, where groups of citizens attempted to storm public buildings so as to proclaim, from inside the power institutions, their autonomous or even independent pro-Russian republics (Melnyk 2014; Portnov 2016; Malyarenko and Wolff 2019).

The collapse of public force in the southeast generated a sense of threat among members of local Maidan groups in their everyday lives, coming both from within their community, as their opponents turned rapidly violent, and from outside, as Russia had largely supported these countermobilizations, pursuing its destabilization policies (Malyarenko and Wolff 2018). This sense of state incapacity to respond properly to the security challenges encouraged pro-Maidan groups to self-organize on regional level, to take charge of safety and security in their cities, and to engage in vigilantism, compensating in such a way for police inaction (Puglisi 2015).

CITIZENS TURNING VIGILANTES IN ODESA

The city of Odesa, situated on the Black Sea in the south of Ukraine, is not an exception—despite its local particularities—in the story of citizens turning vigilantes during the winter of 2013–2014. Vigilante micro groups, such as the Right Sector (Pravyi Sektor), AutoMaidan, Self-Defense (Samooborona), and the Assembly for Citizens' Safety (Rada Hromads'koï Bezpeky, RHB), emerged and got structured in the city, following the violent events of January 19–22 and especially February 18–20, 2014, in Kyiv. On February 18 local Maidan supporters blocked buses belonging to antiriot police from leaving their units in Odesa and going to Kyiv. The next day progovernment private agents (*titushki*) violently attacked, under the cover of the police, a peaceful gathering of local Maidan activists. These two events constituted a turning point for vigilante self-organization in Odesa.³

Russia's annexation of Crimea and the concomitant rise of the pro-Russian movement in the city in the spring of 2014—whose sympathizers were later called "*kulykovtsy*" after the name of Kulykove Pole Square where they set up their tent camp—encouraged further pro-Maidan vigilantism. Local law-enforcement agencies, as well as local elites from the Party of Regions, showed little loyalty to the new government in Kyiv and let the situation in the city deteriorate. In reaction to this, Maidan supporters took security into their own hands so as to prevent Odesa from turning to pro-Russian separatism and following the path of the self-proclaimed People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhans'k in the East. They erected security checkpoints at the main entrances to Odesa, stood guards at these checkpoints, and set up regular patrols on the city streets.⁴ They also provided self-defense training to their sympathizers to learn paramilitary skills (fighting, arms handling, shooting), accumulate and perfect these skills in order to be able to counter their violent opponents from Kulykove Pole. They physically confronted these opponents on several occasions. The first clashes

³ Author's interviews with Vitaliï Ustimenko and Gleb Zhavoronkov, members of Self-Defense from February 2014 to June 2015; interviews conducted in October 2015.

⁴ Author's informal discussions at Self-Defense, AutoMaidan, and RHB headquarters, May 2015.

occurred on March 3, when *kulykovtsy* tried to storm the regional administration offices and hang the Russian flag outside the building, but they were ultimately stopped by pro-Maidan groups. Some minor clashes between two camps followed on March 30 near the statue of Duke Richelieu in the city center and on April 10, when Oleg Tsarev, member of parliament from the Party of Regions and leader of the pro-Russian movement “Southeast,” came to Odesa.⁵ These confrontations culminated on May 2 in the worst civilian death toll the city had seen since the end of the Second World War: 48 dead, including 6 who lost their lives in clashes in downtown Odesa, after the Kulykove Pole movement’s self-defense attacked their pro-Maidan counterparts; 42 perished later in a fire in the city’s Trade Unions House at Kulykove Pole Square, inside which *kulykovtsy* had barricaded themselves trying to escape pro-Maidan groups chasing them, and another 208 were wounded.⁶

By the end of 2014 the danger of Odesa slipping into separatism and war became less acute. However, the vigilante groups that had emerged several months before did not disappear. Moreover, new groups—the National Corps, the Street Front (Vulychni Front), the Concerned (Nebaïduzhy)—have since been formed. All of them are legal entities officially registered by the Ukrainian Ministry of Justice either as non-government organizations or as regional sections of political parties (in the case of the National Corps and the Right Sector) and are listed in the respective state online databases.⁷

Who are these citizens involved in vigilantism in Odesa? What are the normative referents of vigilantes’ activities? What are the dominant perceptions of and their own attitudes toward physical violence and its legitimate use? What relationship have they developed with state institutions, in particular with law-enforcement agencies and local ruling elites? What activities do they engage in at the rear of the war in Donbas? Conversely, how does this war affect vigilantes in Ukraine?

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

To answer these questions, I will, first, situate my analysis within the existing anthropological approaches to vigilantism. Researchers in this field consider vigilantism to be a labile and unstable concept. However, they do accept a minimal practice-centered definition of vigilantism as a more or less structured citizens’ participation in a variety of policing activities focused on provision of security or administration of justice, as a result of these citizens’ criticism of the perceived state incapacity to carry out these functions (Abrahams 1998; Pratten and Sen 2007; Fouchard 2011;

⁵ See the May 2 Group chronology of the spring 2014 events (<http://2maygroup.blogspot.fr/2016/01/chronology-of-events-may-2-2014-in.html#more>).

⁶ See the report of International Advisory Panel of the Council of Europe (<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168048851b>); see also investigation and conclusions conducted by a the nonpartisan civic association May 2 Group: (<http://2maygroup.blogspot.fr/2016/01/chronology-of-events-may-2-2014-in.html#more>).

⁷ See the state registry of (<https://rgo.minjust.gov.ua/>) and the state registry of legal entities, including political parties (<https://online.minjust.gov.ua/edr-search/>).

Favarel-Garrigues and Gayer 2016). Anthropologists also agree on some other definitional dimensions of vigilantism. One of these dimensions is vigilantes' reliance on premeditated acts of force (or threatened force), which means that their action may potentially become violent. Another dimension lies in a tense and even "oxymoronic" relation with the law, as vigilantes recognize for themselves the possibility "to break the law to enforce it, to commit offenses to combat other offences" (Favarel-Garrigues and Gayer 2016:115). Thus they become transgressive and even illegal in that same search for order or justice. David Pratten and Atreyee Sen's book *Global Vigilantes* (2007) points to some other attributes of vigilantism such as a complex relationship between vigilantes as nonstate actors and public officials, made up of multiple forms of negotiation, compromise, and conflict. What these authors describe as the "cheap" character of vigilante law enforcement—in the double sense of a cheap nature of policing practices and their presumably questionable quality—is another dimension of vigilantism. This may result in a process of inclusion and exclusion of citizens from a wide variety of registers, while being considered legitimate within communities in whose name vigilantes claim to act. Finally, the above-mentioned researchers adopt an inductive approach to vigilantism, through a bottom-up analysis of informal policing practices, attentive to their historicity but also, in a more sociological vein, to trajectories of vigilante groups and their members, to forms of individual engagement and disengagement in these groups (Fouchard 2018), and to retributions of their mobilizations or their transactions with elites (Favarel-Garrigues and Gayer 2016). This theoretical and methodological approach to vigilantism corresponds perfectly with the perspective developed in this article.

Secondly, I will borrow from the sociology of crisis situations—political crises (Dobry 1986, 2000), revolutions (Tilly 1978), intrastate wars (Baczko, Dorronsoro, and Quesney 2018), or "neither war nor peace" situation (Linhardt and Moreau de Bellaing 2013)—that provides useful insights on the profound transformations societies undergo in cases of dislocation of an established social order as a result of multisectorial protest mobilizations (political crises) or emergence, within the limits of the same national territory, of different authorities making incompatible claims to control the state (revolutions) and even being engaged in a violent conflict (civil wars). Researchers in this field argue that the redeployment of the state that takes place in these periods of crisis erases dominant norms and routine references, disrupts previously relevant positions, rules, and practices, and induces a profound structural uncertainty that makes it difficult for actors to interpret the situation. Crises, as it has been noted above about Maidan, are also periods of radical re-elaboration of the social order and its dominant categories: rules, discourses, narratives, social roles and behaviors, valuable resources (political, economic, paramilitary), and legitimate distribution of violence are all radically redefined in these situations.

This point about the structural fluidity characteristic of crises is particularly heuristic to my understanding of the development of vigilantism beyond Maidan during the war in Donbas. This is a war whose beginning is clearly identified but whose legal status (an antiterrorist operation between 2014 and 2018, then a joint military forces operation), characteristics ("position war" with low intensity of fight-

ing, fragile and repeatedly violated ceasefires), and deadlock make its interpretation ambiguous for social actors (Colin Lebedev and Shukan 2018). My main hypothesis here is that this intermediary situation of uncertainty between active war and durable peace that Ukraine has been experiencing since 2014 leaves a much larger space for vigilantes' policing activities, giving them new reasons to exist and to act. It also reinforces their paramilitary character, making some of them appear as patriotic militarized corps (Malyarenko and Galbreath 2016), and increases the value of their paramilitary resources and skills. Last but not least, while providing them with legitimating arguments, it also socially legitimizes their activities away from the frontlines, in particular as community guards able to counter the multiple and hybrid threats: disinformation campaigns, Russia-backed destabilization enterprises within Ukraine, or even eventual and sudden military advance of separatist troops. By legitimacy of vigilantism I understand here, following Tilly, "the probability that other authorities [in this case, state institutions, ruling elites, and civil society groups] will act to conform their will" (1985:171) and support their activities. This social recognition of the *raison d'être* of wartime vigilantism by some segments of Ukrainian society does not exclude, at the same time, public controversies surrounding vigilantes' deeds and their denunciation by former affiliates, rival vigilante groups, human right defenders, or journalists.

This analysis will be threefold. First, I will provide a sociological account of the Odesa vigilantes' milieu, its groups and individual members, social profiles of the latter, their views on violence and its legitimate use, and their violent socialization. I will also examine tensions that run through this milieu around the definition of vigilantes' mission. A too-general focus on this milieu would limit, of course, our understanding of vigilantism as diverse and heterogeneous from the point of view of each group's ideology or preferred repertoires of action. Indeed, although all vigilantes stress their loyalty towards Ukraine and claim for themselves the label of Ukrainian "patriots," some of the studied groups are far right with corresponding symbols and gestures, while others profess no particular ideology other than a kind of heightened war patriotism. Some groups are highly militarized and provide regular training in combat sports or paramilitary techniques for their members; they also stage direct, potentially violent, actions. Others pay less attention to the physical condition of their sympathizers and proceed by less radical but still forceful forms of action. The common point of all these groups is, however, that they develop similar policing practices that imply the use of physical force and, further, socialization of their members into the use of arms and combat sports.

Second, I will analyze the three roles taken on by vigilantes—national community guards, patrolling agents, and justice makers—and their corresponding practices, trying to understand them in terms of categories such as state/civil, public/private, and public good/private interests. These roles are analytical categories that I have constructed on the basis of fieldwork materials collected since 2015. Finally, I will examine the complex and ambiguous relationship between vigilantes and Odesa's ruling business and political elites that range from various forms of implicit cooperation and delegation of "dirty work" to direct confrontation.

CONDUCTING RESEARCH ON VIGILANTISM

Grasping vigilantism empirically, through a bottom-up approach, is not an easy task. Vigilante groups tend to be closed, suspicious of outsiders, and afraid of “enemy” infiltration, especially in the context of the war in Donbas. At the same time, as vigilantism must be visible and well known in order to be effective, vigilantes pay a particular attention to their communication strategy and convey to the public a lot of information about their activities. I managed to take advantage of this tension between vigilantes’ propensity for closure and secrecy, on the one hand, and their search for public recognition, on the other, to approach all the above-mentioned vigilante groups, to conduct interviews with their leaders (a total of 15 semistructured interviews) and to observe their various practices directly. Some of these activities (direct actions) were public and required no special effort except to be present in the right place and at the right moment. Others were carried out with more discretion (night citizens’ patrols), and I relied on my established contacts with group leaders so as to be present at some of them. But I was not in any case embedded within these groups and have always preserved my status as an external observer. In the vigilantes’ perception I was a potential useful witness who would disseminate information about their deeds and thus enhance their social reputation.

I also tried to go back to the field on a regular basis (numerous field trips between May 2015 and May 2018) to maintain my previous contacts with these groups, to multiply experiences of ethnographic observation and moments of informal discussion with their leaders. Sometimes these meetings took place on the premises of these groups, allowing for observation of events and actions that they wished to keep more discreet. In addition, I monitored from a distance visual (video or photo) accounts of vigilantes’ actions produced by vigilantes themselves and distributed through social networks (Facebook, YouTube) as a way of objectivizing their existence and the scope of their possibilities. I also collected testimonies of some former group affiliates, who develop critical views on their ex-colleagues’ deeds, as well as critical media stories on vigilantism that are particularly insightful about vigilantes’ activities in the shadows. Finally, I conducted one interview with a representative of Odesa’s regional bureau of the national police; however, observations of interactions between vigilantes and low-ranking police officers on the ground were much more informative. It is on this combination of primary ethnographic fieldwork and secondary materials that my analysis is based.

ODESA’S VIGILANTES’ MILIEU: SOCIAL PROFILES, VIOLENT SOCIALIZATION, AND INTERNAL TENSIONS

SOCIOGRAPHY OF VIGILANTE GROUPS

The closed character of vigilante groups, the fluidity of their structures and affiliations make it difficult to provide a detailed sociographical account of vigilantes’ milieu. Moreover, there is little open-source information about vigilantes’ life trajectories before 2014, as most of them lived rather ordinary lives and were not public figures. It is the Maidan and then the war in Donbas—through the modes of action

these events implied (protests, violent clashes with the police, warfare), the transformations of everyday life they encouraged, and individual and collective changes they brought (Goujon and Shukan 2015)—that made these individuals lose their anonymity, take on new lifestyles, and become public in Odesa's local civic and political life.

However, my analysis of available information collected in the media or through interviews on the trajectories of some leaders of vigilante groups suggests that they have been mobilizing since 2014 people from at least, but not exclusively, four different backgrounds. First, there are business communities known in post-Soviet states for their familiarity with violent methods (Volkov 2002). Second, there are veterans' communities, those of former security services officers or former combatants of the Soviet war in Afghanistan or the war in Donbas, who also have more or less recent experience of armed violence. Thirdly, vigilantism has attracted people from the far right, which was rather small in Odesa before 2014 and refers mainly to sympathizers of the far-right political parties, such as, for example, Svoboda and Patriot of Ukraine, or to football fans. If representatives of these three categories have acquired through their previous trajectories special dispositions for the use of physical force and particular violent skills, they amply developed them through experimentation in the 2014 political turmoil or in warfare. Finally, the young have been particularly attracted to vigilantism: among leaders of vigilante groups we find, indeed, students of history, law, or international relations from Odesa universities, some of whom had been involved in student activism or, before the 2013–2014 turmoil, in promotion of Ukrainian culture and language in the predominantly Russian-speaking city of Odesa. Some of these young people became radicalized in clashes with the police on Maidan in Kyiv, and others in violent confrontations with their opponents in Odesa—that is where they acquired their first self-defense and even paramilitary skills.

Self-Defense, RHB, and AutoMaidan front persons, Vitalii Kozhukhar, Mark Gordienko, and Evhen Rezvushkin respectively,⁸ present the profile of small businessmen in their early or late 40s. Rezvushkin, 40 years old in 2014, ran a small printer cartridge refill business. Gordienko, 46 years old, was in a wine and mineral water-producing business, although he presents himself not only as a businessman but also as a philosopher, writer, and biker. He is one of the few vigilantes to adopt the biker aesthetic with his black-and-red leather jacket and his motorcycle, while all the others prefer military camouflage.⁹ Kozhukhar, 48 years old, had his own small business producing leather accessories and a shop at Odesa's biggest market called the Seventh Kilometer.

Andrii Kotliar, a 44 year-old colleague of Kozhukhar from the early days of Odesa's Self-Defense and now deputy mayor of Odesa in charge of security issues, comes from the security services and war veterans' milieu. A reserve officer and business-

⁸ Leaders of different vigilante groups are all public figures. They communicate extensively on social networks and in local or even national media about themselves, their ideas and their groups' activities, including ones analyzed in this article. This explains my decision to provide their real names here.

⁹ He is fond of the main character from Francis Ford Coppola's film *The Godfather*, refers to it regularly in conversations, and has adopted the music from the film as his phone's ringtone. Author's informal discussions with Gordienko in May 2015, May 2016, and October 2017.

man in the 1990s, he ran Odesa's branch of the Afghanistan war veterans' organization Nobody Except Us in the mid-2000s. In winter 2013–2014 he joined the so-called Afghanistan war veterans' unit within the Self-Defense of Maidan in Kyiv.¹⁰ Back home in Odesa in the spring of 2014 he took on coordination of different pro-Maidan groups' mobilization. Ruslan Forostiak, a founding member of RHB and now adviser to the chief of Odesa's regional bureau of the national police, presents a similar profile,¹¹ even if he comes from the world of former security services officers. In March 2014 he was in charge of the first paramilitary trainings provided to Odesa's self-defense groups. Some younger vigilantes, especially from the Right Sector and the National Corps, have fighting experience in Donbas under their belt and, from this standpoint, present the same background of ex-combatants.

Vigilantism has been particularly attractive for young people between 18 and 25 years of age who acquired their first experience of violence through Maidan and even, for some, in combat in the east of Ukraine. Serhii Sternenko was 18 years old when he became, in March 2014 (and until December 2016), the leader of Odesa's Right Sector. Prior to that he worked as a manager of VK (VKontakte, the Russian equivalent of Facebook) community pages and kept his distance from issues of Ukrainian nationalism.¹² In mid-January 2014 he came for the first time to Maidan supporters' gatherings in Odesa, near the statue of Duke Richelieu, and met there some protestors from football "ultras" and from the far-right party Patriot of Ukraine who were willing to take more radical actions rather than limit themselves to peaceful gatherings. With them he staged a march on January 26 to the seat of the Odesa regional administration, where a huge meeting in support of the ruling Party of Regions was being held. It was with these supporters that he participated in the creation of Odesa's local branch of the Right Sector the following month.

Dem'ian Hanul, 24 years old, head of the security department at Odesa's Right Sector (from February 2014 to December 2015) and leader, since 2016, of the Street Front, followed the same trajectory. He was a second-year student in history at Odesa Pedagogical University in the winter of 2013–2014. When Maidan broke out, he abandoned his studies to take part in the Right Sector's activities in Odesa and occasionally in Kyiv.¹³ Tetiana Soïkina followed a similar pathway, the only difference being that in mid-2013 she was a 22-year-old graduate of the law department of Odesa National University searching for a job.¹⁴ Having been passionate about Ukrainian culture and language, she did not hesitate to choose her side with the beginning

¹⁰ For biographical information, see "Andrei Kotliar: Ot kogo izbavilsia mer Odessy?" *Informatsionnaia Volna*, January 29, 2019. <https://volna.od.ua/2019/01/andrej-kotlyar-ot-kogo-izbavilsya-mer-odessy/>.

¹¹ For biographical information, see "Bez Maidana i pogon: Chto delaet Ruslan Forostiak v odesskoi politsii? (Dos'e)," *IVASI.NEWS*, February 7, 2017. <http://ivasi.news/polites/bez-maydana-i-pogon-chto-delaet-ruslan-forostyak-v-odesskoy-politsii-dose/>.

¹² Author's interview, October 2016.

¹³ Author's interview, May 2017.

¹⁴ Author's interview, February 2017.

of Maidan in Odesa and participated in the emergence of the Right Sector in the city. In mid-2014 she joined the Right Sector battalion at the frontlines in Donbas as a volunteer combatant and gained there her *nom de guerre* of Asketka; she returns to this battalion on a regular basis. Since 2017 she has been at the head of Odesa's Right Sector, being the only woman to hold a leading position in the predominantly male vigilante milieu.

Finally, the trajectory of Oleksandr Novosel's'kyi, a 22-year-old leader of the National Corps between 2016 and 2018, illustrates how initial dispositions to use force acquired in a violent football fan milieu have been enhanced on Maidan and then during the war. Novosel's'kyi abandoned his studies—he was then a first-year student in law at Odesa Law Academy—to go to Maidan in Kyiv. Being already close to the “ultras” milieu, in Kyiv he joined activists from Patriot of Ukraine, and in the spring of 2014, as part of what would later be called the Azov Battalion (Umland 2019), he went with them to fight in the east of Ukraine under the *nom de guerre* of Odesa.

DOMINANT PERCEPTIONS OF PHYSICAL FORCE AND SOCIALIZATION OF PHYSICAL BODIES INTO THE USE OF VIOLENCE

Vigilantes consider physical force as a legitimate means of action in achieving their goals:

Physical force, we need it to impose our ideals and to build a strong Ukraine that our enemies—Russia in the first instance—who advance violently and insidiously, will fear. We also need physical force to resist the corrupt system, whose representatives are still in power. That system relies on the force and on control of the security and the police. That's why National Corps's activists have to be strong. Doing combat sports is at the very heart of our activities. We organize weekly trainings for our sympathizers. We train intensively. We also initiate those who follow us into the use of arms. We teach them how to defend themselves and their country.¹⁵

These words of Oleksandr Novosel's'kyi from the National Corps shed light on justifications mobilized for this particular perception of violence and forceful vigilante interventions. According to the young vigilante, it is the Russia-lead hybrid war in Donbas with its multiple instruments of power (military, political, economic, informational, etc.) and nonlinear warfare especially resistant to obvious detection that requires the use of force. The Ukrainian political system's resistance to profound reforms initiated since Maidan, particularly the fight against corruption, also supports vigilantes' forceful interventions and pressure. Indeed, if Ukraine has undertaken unprecedented transparency and modernization efforts, experts and researchers agree that the main problem of state capture by competing groups of elites and selective distribution of the state's preferences among them remains largely unaddressed (Jarábik and de Wall 2018). In this regard, Serhii Varlamov, the lawyer from the National Corps, argues:

¹⁵ Author's interview with Oleksandr Novosel's'kyi, October 2016.

Nothing has changed since Maidan. Our country is struggling with its past but with the same elites, the same practices. Thanks to the use of “measured” violence, we achieve better results in reforming certain behavior. It’s only by using physical force that we may compel the state and state officials into carrying out correctly their duties and caring about the public good and not their private interests.¹⁶

In Odesa, the capture of the state administration by the mayor of the city Hennadii Trukhanov, a politician and businessman with criminal past,¹⁷ and his business associates, as well as the laissez-faire this elite group is granted by Kyiv in exchange for its loyalty,¹⁸ reinforces vigilantes’ adherence to forceful solutions. Moreover, the alleged control that Trukhanov’s group exercises over law-enforcement agencies (Odesa’s regional branch of the national police or the regional prosecutor’s office), the use of these agencies for the defense of this group’s private interests, and the law enforcers’ inability to prevent or investigate violent attacks against local anticorruption or ecology civic activists in 2017–2018 contribute to legitimizing, beyond the strict vigilantes’ milieu, direct force-based actions and also to their broad acceptance among local nonviolent civil society activists.¹⁹

This situation of local-level state capture provides vigilantes with another argument in favor of their forceful actions, which is the inefficiency of the police in resisting separatism or carrying out, on a daily basis, its main functions of law enforcement. As a consequence, vigilantes all claim that they need to step in and replace the police. According to Mark Gordienko from RHB, the Ukrainian police “is highly inefficient, corrupt, has hands tied up by the Criminal Code. We have to do their job, chasing away separatists and criminals.”²⁰

Even a vast police reform, aimed at increasing the state capacity and reducing low-level corruption through the in-depth transformation of the old post-Soviet *militsyia* to the National Police (Goncharuk 2018), has changed nothing, according to vigilantes, in terms of the police’s capacity to protect citizens. This justifies their mission. “The selfie men?”²¹ exclaims Serhii Sternenko.

This is our new police! They are badly trained, highly inefficient, and do not know how to compile a police protocol. There are some new adequate persons among

¹⁶ Author’s interview, May 2017.

¹⁷ Anna Bavinets and Elena Loginova, “London Apartments Show Ongoing Ties of Odesa Mayor to Oil Mafia,” *Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting*, April 24, 2018. <https://www.occrp.org/en/paradisepapers/london-apartments-show-ongoing-ties-of-odesa-mayor-to-oil-mafia>.

¹⁸ Kristina Berdinskikh, “Odessa papa,” *Novoe vremia*, June 27, 2018. <https://magazine.nv.ua/journal/3186-24-27-iyunya-2018/odessa-papa.html>.

¹⁹ Issues of public interest (defense of littoral zones or parks against real estate developers closely linked to the city mayor) thus give ground in Odesa to broad mobilizations of ecological organizations, anticorruption activists, ordinary citizens, and vigilantes.

²⁰ Author’s interview, May 2015.

²¹ The term “selfie men” is used since the summer of 2015 to discredit patrol police on the streets, whose representatives took selfies with citizens as part of a police communication strategy.

this police force who are willing to learn, but there were no changes at the higher levels of the hierarchy. The old guard with its old practices is still there.²²

Vitalii Kozhukhar from Self-Defense argues for the need to surveil tightly how the police carry out their functions:

We report problematic cases to law-enforcement agencies. In case of an offense, we always bring the police to the scene. But through our own interventions, we also put pressure on them to respect the law and fulfill their obligations. We expect only that. Let the police and the courts do their job. Only when they will do it correctly, we'll go home quietly and concentrate our efforts and resources more on patriotic education.²³

Finally, Dem'ian Hanul from the Street Front points openly to the failure of reforms both in Odesa and nationwide:

I would say that nothing has changed except for the cars and the uniforms, with only this exception: the men with the stout silhouettes from the former traffic police have been replaced by fragile young boys and girls. Police reform is another "fake" produced by our power holders. Police in Odesa are at the service of the criminal gang that rules here. They do not defend ordinary citizens. As long as the state administrations remain in the hands of the bastards, no reform will help us.²⁴

Their particular views on physical force and its justified and legitimate uses explain the continuous socialization of vigilantes into violence. Vigilantes train their bodies to use force and weapons in a variety of settings. There are, first, paramilitary trainings (*vyskyl* in Ukrainian) that are organized at improvised and more or less well-equipped training camps or in the open air. Traditionally staged by Ukrainian scout or ultranationalist organizations, these training sessions are aimed at developing paramilitary skills in discipline, street fighting, tactical medicine, and firearms. Odesa's Self-Defense organizes its paramilitary sessions on a regular basis, both for its members and for the general public, on the territory of its training camp Patriot. The camp was set up in late 2014 with the help of the Society for the Enhancement of the Defense of Ukraine (TSOU, formerly DOSAAF) and its trainers. RHB runs a camp called Ukrop, for Ukraïns'ki Opir Odes'ka Sich (Ukrainian Resistance Odesa Camp),²⁵ situated on the empty lot of a former military base. Throughout 2014–2017 the group provided there three–ten-day training sessions for schoolchildren between 12 and 16 years of age that introduced their participants to camping, shooting, first aid techniques, and street fighting

²² Author's interview with Serhii Sternenko, October 2016.

²³ Author's interview, May 2016.

²⁴ Author's interview, May 2017.

²⁵ *Ukrop* is a derogatory Russian slang term used to refer to Ukrainians.

techniques and taught them how to behave in case of an eventual enemy attack.²⁶ The group also regularly staged training sessions for adults, mainly affiliates from RHB, AutoMaidan, and even the Right Sector, with introductions to the tactics of close-contact engagement in urban combat environment in a so-called kill-house, a live-ammunition, small-arms shooting range. As for the Right Sector and the National Corps, they usually organize their trainings outdoors. All these training events are photographed or filmed by vigilantes themselves and promoted through social media, as part of strategic communications about the groups' strength and readiness to fight back.

The mobility of some vigilante groups' members between the battle lines in Donbas and their engagement in the rear in Odesa also makes it possible for them to improve their combat skills. All Right Sector affiliates are given the opportunity to join the front for several weeks or months and practice these skills on the battlefield as part of the organization's fighting unit called the Volunteer Ukrainian Corp (DUK). A particular relationship RHB members have with the Arrata volunteer battalion allows them to do the same. As for the National Corps, several of its leading members already have a rich fighting experience within the volunteer Azov Battalion.

Martial arts sports clubs (boxing, taekwondo, judo, wrestling) offer yet another perfect setting where vigilantes train and exercise their bodies. Members of the Right Sector and the Street Front go to established sports clubs (such as Baby Tiger or Europe) or rent space where their instructors organize special trainings. After several years of training in private clubs, in 2018 Odesa's National Corps finally opened its own club called Legion. These paramilitary, as well as martial arts, trainings that are offered by vigilantes free of charge create a powerful incentive for the young to join these structures, in addition to the excitement of their direct actions and forceful confrontations with the "enemy."

Finally, vigilantes' particular relation to the physical or armed violence is manifested through their external appearance and outfits aiming to signify their capacity to impose their views by force. Self-Defense, RHB, and AutoMaidan affiliates usually wear military camouflage. Their younger fellows give preference to street- or sportswear with sneakers, hoodies or sweatshirts, and sport-style joggers or sweat pants. The National Corps provides its members with black paramilitary uniforms or blue vests with the organization's insignia painted in yellow, which are worn on the occasions of their various actions. Paramilitary aesthetics among the young vigilantes from the National Corps, the Street Front, and the Right Sector also implies wearing so-called tactic beards. This bearded aesthetics is related to the functions that, according to vigilantes, a beard may fulfill in warfare, such as highlighting one's virility, helping to disguise one's identity, protecting the face from cold temperatures, and simply being more practical than shaving every day.²⁷

²⁶ Author's field observations, May 2015 and May 2016.

²⁷ Author's informal discussions with National Corps (October 2016, May 2017) and Street Front (May 2017) affiliates.

THE UNDERSTANDING OF VIGILANTES' MISSION AS A STRUCTURING CLEAVAGE

While the various Odesa vigilante groups had cooperated in resisting their pro-Russian opponents in the spring of 2014, dissensions arose rapidly in this milieu around the definition of vigilantes' morality and functions, their understanding of "public interest," as well as their relationship to the elite group controlling the city. These dissensions are due to the intrinsic tension that undermines vigilantism, as a form of coercive collective action, between disinterest and defense of public interest, on the one hand, and a need for material and financial resources to properly carry out missions and private interest, on the other.

Representatives of all the studied groups claim not to be interested in material gain and do not earn their living from their activities. They also put forward the "cheap" nature of their policing activities, even if all have offices in the city center, need to pay for their training in sports clubs, and have to reward in some way their members when vigilantism implies a full-time involvement. Vigilantes generally evade these questions of resources in interviews, pretending that they themselves pay for these things or that their good and disinterested friends from the business community support them. Few acknowledge the material rewards that they may get from their "donors," presenting these rewards as social recognition for their actions and thus as a kind of indirect consequence of vigilantism. In this respect, Mark Gordienko from RHB is the most straightforward: "we do not have a fixed charge for our interventions. If a businessman or a citizen wants to reward us, we can't prevent him/her from doing it."²⁸

In such a situation, talking about a particular vigilante group "serving private interests," "being paid for their forceful services," or even "going criminal" is a common delegitimization argument in this milieu. It is extensively used to discredit opponents and has become a cleavage structuring various groups into loose coalitions. The first coalition federates Self-Defense, AutoMaidan, and RHB, whose members took part in dubious interventions or corporate disputes, which caused, as a consequence, more or less important defections among their young rank-and-file. In the summer of 2015 Odesa's Self-Defense was accused of involvement in a hostile corporate takeover of a jewelry factory.²⁹ AutoMaidan, headed by Evhen Rezvushkin, and RHB and its leader Mark Gordienko also face accusations of criminalization of their activities—particularly of providing protection services to some illegal businesses or of participating in illegal corporate raiding.³⁰ The particular relationship that these groups enjoy with the local ruling elites and Mayor Trukhanov—this question will be examined in the third part of the article in more detail—also enhances their questionable image among civil society groups in Odesa. Vitaliï Ustimenko, former member of Self-

²⁸ Author's informal discussion, May 2017.

²⁹ Author's interview with Gleb Zhavoronkov, October 2015.

³⁰ See "Prybutkova sprava: Iak psevdoaktyvisty neschadno zarobliaiut' na ukraïntsiakh," 24 Kanal, posted November 8, 2018. Video, 21:19. <https://youtu.be/65ssxaCv2Xo>.

Defense and now leader of an anticorruption group also called AutoMaidan,³¹ characterizes the first vigilante coalition as follows:

They became a kind of organized criminal group, whose services you may buy, for example, to obtain a favorable court decision. Their modus operandi is the following: they come to court dressed up in military camouflage, they shout, they perform the national anthem, they disturb the audience, they may block the judges and the process. While doing this, they pretend to defend the public interest and society's point of view. These actions blemish our civil society reputation, discredit the idea of self-organization.³²

The second coalition brings together the Right Sector, the National Corps, the Street Front, and the Concerned, who also deliver a harsh critique of their "opponents" from the first coalition, denouncing them for having betrayed ideals of "public good" and "justice" and for serving the ruling elites' interests. Oleksandr Novosel's'kyi, leader of Odesa's National Corps until 2018, argues:

We defend the public interest. We do not sell our services to private groups. We keep our distance from these power-elite games. We stage common direct actions with the Right Sector, the Street Front, or other civic groups that have the same sense of public good as us. We will never compromise ourselves with RHB or AutoMaidan of Rezvushkin.³³

However, leaders from the second coalition have also been, on various occasions, suspected of following their private interests and even of being involved in illicit activities. One of the criminal investigations opened in 2017 against Serhii Sternenko (of the Right Sector and later the Concerned) concerns protection services he allegedly granted to drug dealers in exchange for regular payments and for violent raids he reportedly organized against rival vendors.³⁴ In 2016 the Right Sector experienced minor defections following these reputation-damaging accusations. The National Corps leader Oleksandr Novosel's'kyi has also compromised himself in a murky affair involving kidnapping and extortion.³⁵ After he was arrested (and later released) in the spring of 2018 on these criminal charges, within a year his organization replaced him with another ex-Azov Battalion combatant from Kyiv. Consequently, even

³¹ Members of this group decided to take the same name as the first-generation AutoMaidan of Odesa so as to rehabilitate by their actions the name of this movement. This second AutoMaidan is part of the nationwide AutoMaidan movement, while the original AutoMaidan was excluded from it for its actions in 2016. Author's interview with Vitalii Ustimenko, May 2017.

³² Author's interview, May 2017.

³³ Author's interview, October 2016.

³⁴ For more information on this case, see "Ubi vshego cheloveka odesskogo aktivista sudiat za 'kryshevanie' narkotorgovli," *Iuzhnyi Dozor*, October 30, 2018. <https://uc.od.ua/news/crime/1207919>.

³⁵ Aleksandr Sibirtsev, "Svodnaia banda national-radikalov i veteranov spetsnaza Kadyrova pokhishchala liudei v Odesse," *Strana.ua*, March 24, 2018. <https://strana.ua/articles/rassledovaniia/131670-kak-banda-sultana-honjala-biznes-v-odesse-i-ktv-v-nee-vkhodil.html>.

if the two vigilante coalitions oppose each other in their respective visions of their mission, they all seem to encounter difficulties in addressing this tension between their disinterested involvement and need for resources.

VIGILANTES' ROLES AND PRACTICES: NATIONAL COMMUNITY GUARDS, PATROLLING AGENTS, JUSTICE MAKERS

The war in Donbas weighs heavily on and determines a large spectrum of vigilantes' activities that go from occasional participation in the warfare in Donbas to solidarity with soldiers in the war zone (through delivery of food, supplies, and ammunition) to various missions carried out in Odesa, far from the frontlines. Three main roles and associated practices implemented at the rear of the war emerge from this diversity: national community guards, patrolling agents, and justice makers. While performing these roles, vigilante groups not only compete with each other in their search for highly visible issues to invest in that are likely to enhance their social legitimacy, but also occasionally combine their efforts to compensate for their relatively small numbers.

NATIONAL COMMUNITY GUARDS: NAMING, SHAMING, AND ATTACKING THE "ENEMY"

The role of national community guards refers to vigilantes' involvement in naming, shaming, surveilling, and even attacking external and internal enemies and thus protecting their fellow citizens against threats these enemies represent. In this way, vigilantes largely contribute to the construction and reproduction over time of the wartime opposition between enemies and friends. Being located outside of the community, the external enemy is easily identifiable in wartime: the Russian Federation and its proxies on the territory of Ukraine. The internal enemy is much more insidious, according to vigilantes, because it has infiltrated the national body and needs to be identified, surveilled, pressured, and even physically counteracted. Internal enemies are those who are suspected of lacking loyalty to Ukraine, undermining the national interest, and carrying threats from Russia (pro-Russian separatism, terrorism, etc.).

The Russian Federation Consulate in Odesa, located at the address 14 Haharins'ke Plateau, embodies the image of the external enemy and is regularly targeted by vigilantes, as on June 10, 2016, when vigilantes from Self-Defense, AutoMaidan, RHB, and the Right Sector gathered in front of the building to disrupt a reception in honor of Russian Independence Day,³⁶ or as on March 18, 2018, on the occasion of the presidential election in Russia. Even if Kyiv banned voting in the Russian elections on the territory of Ukraine, vigilantes from Self-Defense and AutoMaidan came that day to the consulate in order to make sure that the ban was fully implemented. In military attire, under the slogan of "No to the election of Putin in Odesa," and to the sound of patriotic songs, they erected a sort of a barricade with sandbags and stretched a red wire across the road going to the consulate, physically and symbolically blocking ac-

³⁶ "Evromaidanovtsy' osadili Genkonsul'stvo RF v Odesse," *Timer-Odesa*, June 10, 2016. http://timer-odessa.net/news/evromaydanovtsi_osadili_genkonsulstvo_rf_v_odesse_s_navozom_i_viselitsami_693.html.

cess to these premises and thus impeding voting.³⁷ Their counterparts from the Right Sector and the National Corps also occupied the site, thus overcoming dissension within the vigilantes' milieu.

Russian businesses in Ukraine represent the second external enemy figure that vigilantes shame and pressure. Vitaliï Kozhukhar, Self-Defense leader, put it this way:

We track Russian influence in the business milieu, trying to combat it. Russians control businesses in the energy distribution sector, tobacco or casinos here in Odesa. They all are Russia's agents of influence. We block their activities. We hand information about them over to the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU). We deploy efforts to push them out of these businesses and out of Ukraine.³⁸

The blockade of the Russian bank Sberbank and its regional branches all over the country initiated by the National Corps in March–May 2017 provides a good example of vigilantes' attacks on Russian business interests in Ukraine. In Odesa youngsters from the National Corps barricaded the entrance of the Sberbank's regional branch, at the corner of Ievreïś'ka and Rishel'ievś'ka Streets, with blocks of cement; they tagged the premises, pasted stickers reading "Beware. This is the bank of an aggressor country. It is urgent to get your money back!" and organized day-and-night pickets nearby.³⁹ Vigilantes from AutoMaidan also staged actions in front of this local branch, as evidenced by photo reports on the group's Facebook page, associating themselves with the blockade and engaging in competition with the National Corps about each group's efficacy in fighting the Russian business presence in Ukraine.

In the autumn of 2017 the National Corps also campaigned, nationwide and at the regional level, against the lottery company MCL, which was accused of being both a Russian business and an illegal gaming business. In Odesa National Corps sympathizers even carried out several raids against different MCL premises, forcefully breaking in, engaging in violent discussions with visitors and owners, and causing some material damage. However, the motivation behind these anti-Russian business campaigns raises serious questions in regard to their final outcome: both the MCL lottery network and the Russian Sberbank continue their business activities in Ukraine, which gives grounds to allegations concerning accommodations the vigilantes might have made with the owners of these companies.

Vigilantes are also engaged, rhetorically and practically, in surveilling, shaming, and attacking internal enemies and thus in redefining Ukrainian citizenship and its newly acceptable practices. By doing this, they produce different forms of inclusion in and exclusion from citizenship, such categorizing dynamics being fueled by the war.

"Internal enemy" designates in the first place "false" or "disloyal" Ukrainians, who are suspected of acting against national community interests and are collectively and individually discredited as "separatists." Vigilantes claim to closely surveil the behavior of these "separatists" and even impose different sanctions infringing

³⁷ Author's observation of Facebook accounts of Self-Defense and AutoMaidan.

³⁸ Author's interview, May 2016.

³⁹ Author's field observations, May 2017.

on those citizens' rights. The leader of RHB, Mark Gordienko, defines this mission as follows: "We are in a situation of a double war. The first war is against the external enemy, Russia. And the second is against a more ferocious enemy, an interior enemy. These enemies live next door and may betray at any moment. Identifying them is hard. Preventing them from wrongdoing is our mission."⁴⁰ Vitaliï Kozhukhar from Odesa's Self-Defense supports his colleague: "Our mission consists in a continuous fight against separatism among our fellow citizens and also within the state and its institutions. It's illusory to think that the threat is not here anymore. Or course, it's less visible in the streets, but still real and even more insidious."⁴¹

This fight against manifestations of "separatism" and thus internal enemies takes different forms. First of all, vigilantes organize, as was mentioned in the introduction with the story of Pishchana, "moralization" discussions with persons suspected of being Russian sympathizers. They also pay moralization visits to places that have a reputation of being "separatist," such as, for example, the village of Kuchurgan in Odesa Oblast, at the border of the Republic of Transnistria, a pro-Russian breakaway region of Moldova, where vigilantes from Self-Defense, AutoMaidan, and the Right Sector went on May 11, 2017, when they learned that local elected officials had organized two days previously, on Victory Day, a car race under Soviet flags.⁴² In military camouflage, with blue-and-yellow and red-and-black flags, as well as with their respective organizations' banners, they organized a meeting in the central square of Kuchurgan and delivered to locals a kind of lesson in "civics," explaining the geopolitical situation of the contemporary Ukraine, labeling Russia as an aggressor, and calling upon loyalty to Ukraine. At the end of the gathering they sang the national anthem. They also paid a visit to a local school, where a teacher of the Ukrainian language complained to them of being under pressure from her pro-Russian colleagues. They met high school students and had discussions with them about what it means to be a patriot and a good citizen in war-torn Ukraine.⁴³ As with other moralization visits,⁴⁴ this one aimed at marking the territory of Kuchurgan as being Ukrainian, at making public vigilantes' particular attention to it and their readiness to intervene there, as well as at promoting their moral vision of patriotism.

Fighting the internal enemy also brings vigilantes into conflict with the remnants of the Kulykove Pole movement, especially on the occasion of this movement's public gatherings at the Kulykove Pole Square, a vast esplanade in front the Trade

⁴⁰ Author's interview, May 2016.

⁴¹ Author's interview, May 2016.

⁴² "Odesskie patrioty priekhali na razborki v selo, gde mestnye ustraivali avtoprogeg s sovetskoi simbolikoi," Dumskaia, May 11, 2017. <https://dumskaia.net/news/zavarushka-v-kuchurganah-odesskie-patrioty-prieh-072094/>.

⁴³ For an extract of this discussion, see the video shot by vigilantes themselves: "Patrioty Odessa priekhali v shkolu sela Kuchurgany," posted May 13, 2017. Video, 3:42. <https://youtu.be/BTUK-hapTZI>.

⁴⁴ See, for example, this visit paid by Self-Defense, AutoMaidan, and RHB to the village of Rozkvit on October 3, 2017, as told on the website of Odesa's Self-Defense (<http://oborona.odessa.ua/aktyvisty-patriotychnyh-organizatsij-vyyihaly-v-selo-rozkvit-berezovskogo-rajonu/>).

Unions House, where 42 people died in a fire on May 2, 2014. Between 50 and 200 people (families of the dead, Soviet nostalgics, and Communist Party of Ukraine sympathizers) meet there on every May 2, but also sometimes on the second of the month and even on Sundays at 2 pm to commemorate the dead and to express their “disloyalty” to the government and to Ukraine.⁴⁵

Vigilantes from all groups unanimously consider these gatherings to be an open call for separatism and a threat to the security of Odesa. They claim that these public events have to be prohibited. At every meeting members of AutoMaidan, RHB, the Right Sector, the National Corps, and others show up at Kulykove Pole Square, pretending to monitor the situation. As I have observed on numerous occasions, they disrupt through their presence ceremonies staged by their opponents, drown out their speeches with music, loudly shouted slogans, or singing of the national anthem, and provoke them verbally and even physically. Indeed, every time the physical proximity between the two camps runs the risk of degenerating into violent clashes—especially on the traditional gathering date of May 2, when the two camps can mobilize large number of sympathizers—but the police manage to prevent them by separating the two sides. However, vigilantes attack the memorial leftovers of Kulykove Pole gatherings, destroying candles, throwing away flowers, and so on.

Through these activities against their opponents, vigilante groups contribute to the categorization of Ukrainians as either good citizens worth defending or bad ones whose rights need to be limited. Among the latter are, rather surprisingly, Ukrainian pop stars who come on tour to Odesa and who are carefully screened by vigilantes. Any singer who has performed in Russia or in the annexed Crimea since 2014 is denounced as a “traitor” to the national interest and their concerts are forcefully disrupted, as happened to Ani Lorak in August 2014 or Iryna Bilyk in May 2017.

Odesa’s regional branch of the Opposition Bloc (former President Yanukovich’s Party of Regions), being also categorized as an internal enemy, is another target of vigilantes. In March 2015, April 2016, and January 2017, Self-Defense, RHB, and the Right Sector activists obstructed roundtable discussions organized by the Opposition Bloc in Odesa as a potential *porto franco*, an economic duty-free zone.⁴⁶ The Self-Defense spokesperson Vitaliï Kozhukhar explains these interventions as follows:

As soon as separatism raises its head, we block all its manifestations. Two weeks ago, the Opposition Bloc tried to organize a roundtable in the city center on *porto franco*. They have invited the Opposition Bloc MPs from the Supreme Rada. We entered the premises where they had gathered and prevented them from giving their speeches. We obstructed this event. *Porto franco* is maybe a good idea

⁴⁵ Author’s field observations, May 2015, May 2016, October 2016, May 2017, and May 2018.

⁴⁶ In the literal translation from Italian *porto franco* means “free port” and refers here to the right granted to Odesa in 1817 within the Russian Empire to conduct free trade. Since 2014, claims for the status of *porto franco*, put forward by pro-Russian forces such as the Opposition Bloc, are perceived as an expression of separatism.

for Odesa's port, but it is instrumentally used by disreputable political forces and at a very inopportune moment. There won't be roundtables like this in Odesa.⁴⁷

On several occasions vigilantes have also attacked premises of the Opposition Bloc in Odesa, such as on May 3, 2017, when Street Front activists tagged the building and set fire to a tent with Opposition Bloc symbols that stood nearby.

Local state representatives, including state officials and judges, are the final category of the internal enemy that vigilantes are fighting against as part of post-Maidan political lustration and anticorruption drive. Because Maidan did not achieve a "revolutionary outcome" (Tilly 1978) in terms of dismantling old institutions, elites, and practices, including corruption that undermines the state from within, vigilantes promote from below a revolutionary agenda by putting physical pressure on the failed state machinery.

Members of different groups intervene within different institutions pretending to exercise so-called citizens' control. In the first place, this concerns the judiciary, which is handled with a large arsenal of means that go from trial monitoring to physical disruption of court hearings and physical threats to judges.⁴⁸ The so-called May 2 trial, where 21 pro-Russian activists were charged over the fatal disturbances in Odesa on May 2, 2014, provides the best example of vigilantes pressuring the judiciary. In December 2015 members of Self-Defense, RHB, and AutoMaidan forced three judges from the Malinovs'kyi District Court, who were in charge of the case and were about to release on bail the defendants, to write a resignation letter.⁴⁹

Right Sector, Self-Defense, and National Corps activists regularly attended hearings of the Malinovs'kyi District Court and of the Odesa Court of Appeals to monitor the situation in the courtroom, standing ready to disrupt proceedings in case judges decided to release the May 2 case defendants.⁵⁰ They even physically blocked the Odesa Court of Appeals on several occasions. As a result of their pressure on the judiciary, judges from the Malinovs'kyi District Court and later judges of other district courts in Odesa asked to be removed from the case. In December 2016 the case was ultimately transferred to the court in Chornomors'k, a town formerly known as Illichivs'k, near Odesa. On September 18, 2017, when the court in Chornomors'k ruled in favor of releasing the accused, vigilantes from AutoMaidan, RHB, the Right Sector, and the Street Front provoked a violent brawl with the police when it attempted to implement the court decision. Disorder caused in this way provided the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) with the opportunity to evacuate and arrest two primary de-

⁴⁷ Author's interview, May 2016.

⁴⁸ Author's field observations, October 2017.

⁴⁹ "Pravyi sektor' blokiroval Malinovskii sud," *Odesskaia zhizn'*, November 30, 2015. <https://odessa-life.od.ua/news/31616-pravyi-sektor-zayavil-o-drake-v-malinovskom-sude>.

⁵⁰ Author's field observations, May 2016 and October 2017. According to the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, of more than 100 hearings in Maliniv'skyi District Court only 20 were not disrupted and were actually able to examine the evidence. Halya Coynash, "Dramatic Acquittals in Trial over Odesa 2 May 2014 Riots," *Human Rights in Ukraine*, September 19, 2017. <http://khp.org/en/index.php?id=1505775298>.

fendants: Sergei Dolzhenkov, who is considered to be an organizer of the riots on May 2, and Evgenii Mefedov, a Russian citizen and participant in these events.⁵¹

Vigilantes regularly pressure other state institutions and their officials, especially the regional prosecutor general's office in Odesa. In 2015 Self-Defense, RHB, AutoMaidan, and the Right Sector staged rallies in front of the regional prosecutor's office against its officials who had been targeted by the 2014 lustration law but had not been removed from their positions. In early 2016 the groups mobilized to obtain the removal of prosecutor Mykola Stoianov, who was restored to his position by a court decision after having been dismissed as part of the lustration process. Odesa's city council, which often grants land parcels in the historical part of the city or in the littoral zone for development to the mayor's business partners, and Odesa's DABI (state architecture and construction inspection agency) in charge of delivering construction permits and inspecting construction sites are also at the center of vigilantes' attention. The groups stage public rallies near these administrations to pressure them to carry out their duties in the public interest. They sometimes go even further, destroying some allegedly illegal constructions—as on April 30, 2017, at Otrada Beach or on September 3, 2017, when the Street Front, the National Corps, the Right Sector, and anticorruption activists combined efforts to dismantle an illegal construction in a prohibited area next to the so-called House with One Wall, a historical monument in Odesa. Finally, in October 2017 they physically opposed a project to build a shopping center on the territory of the so-called Summer Theater in the heart of the city. In these two last cases, vigilantes' forceful intervention was considered a necessary and legitimate response to the corruption of state officials and was welcomed by all Odesa civil society groups.

PATROLLING AGENTS

Patrolling the streets or, as they claim, maintaining public order, preventing crime, providing security, and even enforcing the law is the second role performed by vigilantes. This responsibility is largely determined, as mentioned above, by their views about the police and its incapacity to properly carry out its mission. Throughout 2014–2015 Self-Defense, RHB, AutoMaidan, and the Right Sector were actively involved in policing activities through regular daytime and, especially, night citizens' patrols. This form of patrolling became less frequent after state law-enforcement agencies recovered their authority and once, in the autumn of 2015, the new Patrol Police replaced the old *militiia* on the streets of Odesa. However, citizens' patrols with their particular instruments such as "citizen's arrests" have not totally disappeared from vigilantes' repertoire of action.

In the spring and autumn of 2015 I had several opportunities to participate in patrols carried out by AutoMaidan and RHB. These experiences were very helpful for grasping the phenomenon, its materiality, and the challenge it presents to the monopoly that the state claims over law enforcement. Patrols I participated in included several groups of three or four volunteers and a driver with a car. Members of each

⁵¹ Halya Coynash, "Dramatic Acquittals in Trial over Odesa 2 May 2014 Riots," Human Rights in Ukraine, September 19, 2017. <http://khp.org/en/index.php?id=1505775298>.

patrol were equipped with walkie-talkies and self-defense devices: batons, baseball bats, or tear gas sprays; one patrol had, in addition, a pneumatic firearm in case of emergency. While driving around the city center, patrol members listened to police radio frequencies so as to be able to intervene as quickly as possible. They also reacted to what was going on in the streets and activities that seemed “suspicious.” Finally, they reacted to emergency or suspicious activities that were reported by ordinary citizens through the RHB or AutoMaidan hotlines.

While on duty on May 1, 2015, the patrol whose activities I observed performed a set of police-like actions. Its members stopped men on the street and checked their identity. They also stopped cars for security checks, asking the drivers to open their car trunks. Male members of our patrol intervened in a violent brawl that broke out on the streets near a nightclub, but then gave way to police who arrived quickly on the spot. Female participants observed the events at some distance, revealing the gendered distribution of roles in vigilante groups. Finally, on Deribasivs’ka Street, in the very heart of Odesa, patrol members performed a citizen’s arrest, an arrest made in a litigious situation and in the absence of a sworn law-enforcement official,⁵² by apprehending four players of a shell game, tying up their hands with plastic rope and escorting them to the nearest police station. One of the patrol participants gave false testimony against the arrested players by pretending to be their alleged victim. Forty minutes later the police officers released the players, having filed a case against three of them.

This example of a citizen’s arrest and its modalities is particularly revealing of the gray area that surrounds this *de jure* legal practice, especially in the time lapse between the arrest itself and the consequent transfer to the police: while vigilantes do not usually punish “wrongdoers” themselves, they do however tie up their hands, restrain their liberty, and punch them, bypassing the initial mission of a citizen’s arrest. These state-like acts of law enforcement performed at the moment of arrest erase the boundaries between the permitted and the forbidden, between a legal action and an offense, between crime prevention and unlawful restraint of civil rights, between legitimate or illegitimate use of force. This blurring of categories is particularly evident through the reaction that the patrol intervention received in the streets from a witness of the scene: “Who are you?” he asked. “Why are you terrorizing people in Odesa?” Police officers deployed on the streets that day themselves contributed to questioning of the dominant categories and accepted law-enforcement practices: they asked the patrol members to open, without any search warrant, a car parked in the street that they found suspicious. Other informal interactions between vigilante patrols and the police I have observed while taking part in patrols confirm an implicit recognition by the police of vigilantes’ usefulness.

If citizens’ patrols on the streets have become less regular since 2016, different vigilante groups—Self-Defense, AutoMaidan, the Right Sector, and especially the Na-

⁵² According to Article 2 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code, a citizen who witnesses an act that may potentially be qualified as a crime has the right to apprehend the perpetrator, with the exception of judges and MPs, who are granted professional immunity. Immediately following the arrest, the citizen has to hand over the arrested person to the police.

tional Corps—still practice them, especially on the days leading up to anniversaries of May 2 events in Odesa or Victory Day on May 9, when risks of potential tensions increase. Patrolling initiatives are also more frequent in remote rural areas of Odesa Oblast, where vigilantes have greater latitude because of a less pronounced police and state presence there. In August–September 2016 Odesa National Corps conducted patrols for more than three weeks in the village of Loshchynivka, where a violent conflict had broken out between villagers from Bulgarian and Roma communities after a little girl was molested and killed. Oleksandr Novosel's'kyi justified the National Corps intervention in Loshchynivka in the following terms:

When we arrived to the village, we saw chaos and impunity. Local Bulgarians wanted the Roma out of their village. We helped them to self-organize in order to patrol the village and its surroundings. This case confirms that there is no state in rural areas. There is only one policeman for three villages; roads are in bad conditions, by the time the police show up, someone may be already dead. That's why we need to be present in these areas and to help ordinary people.⁵³

Trying to distinguish itself from other vigilante groups and claiming the role of policing agent exclusively for itself, in late 2017 the National Corps formed its nationwide, militia-type movement called Natsional'na druzhyna and the following year—the Odesa local branch of the movement, whose members took on themselves the task of unofficially maintaining public order in the streets of Odesa.

Vigilantes consider citizen's arrests as a legitimate means of action. The lawyer for Odesa National Corps justifies them as follows:

Of course, our guys practice citizen's arrests, especially when someone behaves in a bizarre way in the streets or seems suspicious to us. We ask the person to stop. We shine a light into his face, if things happen at night. We ask him to tell us what he is doing and even to show us his identity documents. If the person reacts badly or even starts running away, then we declare him a suspect and arrest him. All is in accordance with the Criminal Code. Later we hand over the person to the police.⁵⁴

As these words indicate, it is the context itself of such an arrest—several brawny guys stopping a person in the street, shining a light in his/her face, questioning, and even searching—that raises the question of the difference between a legal policing practice and an offense.

Finally, vigilantes' involvement in patrolling also gives way to occasional raids against illegal alcohol or drug dealers or even brothels. In 2015–2017 Self-Defense, the Right Sector, and the National Corps intensively conducted raids against alcohol/drugs production and distribution places that were reported to them by residents of different districts of Odesa. Their modus operandi is rather classic: one of the vigilantes does a so-called controlled purchase (of alcohol, drugs, or sexual services) to

⁵³ Author's interview, October 2016.

⁵⁴ Author's interview with Serhii Varlamov, May 2017.

“test” the product and the seller, and afterwards the others intervene with the owners of the place in order to “convince” them to close it down, by arguing or using force against them and their premises.⁵⁵ They also call the police to the scene and refer these cases to it; they usually find, however, police officers’ responses rather disappointing.

JUSTICE MAKERS

The role of justice makers that vigilantes perform contributes to their legitimacy among ordinary citizens, especially those who consider themselves to be unjustly humiliated or neglected by state institutions and feel their rights are not respected through formal channels (administrative or court decisions, police interventions, etc.). “We are attentive to citizens’ demands,” declares Tetiana Soïkina from the Right Sector. “These people are often victims of dirty games among the powerful ones. They face injustice that the state apparatus fails to address. We intervene on their behalf, trying to win their hearts by our concrete deeds.”⁵⁶

To maintain a relationship of proximity with ordinary people and be able to defend their cause, vigilantes developed crisis “hotlines”—in other words, emergency cell phone numbers. Citizens disappointed by the failure of the law-enforcement agencies or the judiciary to protect citizens’ rights may use the hotlines to report cases of “injustice” and ask for practical help. During our conversation, Tetiana Soïkina received a call on the Right Sector “hotline”: the owner of a small shop reported an attempted corporate attack on her property and called upon vigilantes’ intervention. Soïkina sent a group of her colleagues to the spot in order to physically counter the attack and joined them later to evaluate the case from a legal point of view. As it seemed to be a clear-cut case, the group promised the owner that they would accompany her further in defending her cause.

Citizens also come to vigilantes’ offices to make their complaints, as I observed at the RHB and National Corps headquarters in 2016–2017, recognizing in this way their authority and effectiveness where state institutions fail. Vigilantes receive complainants, listen to their stories, ask them to put their requests for help in writing, describing their experience of injustice, presenting in details their grievances, and identifying the persons responsible (corrupt judges, state officials, police, etc.). They also study documents related to reported cases (administrative or court decisions, property titles, etc.) and intercede—or not, depending on their assessment of the situation—on behalf of complainants. In many cases, according to them, the law is at odds with the common sense of justice. Defined in rather vague terms as an “inner sense of justice” or the “justice that led them to take to the streets and protest during Maidan,” it leads them to simply try to make justice themselves. In other words, they replace formal institutions in contentious situations, such as that of Pishchana described in the introduction.

⁵⁵ Author’s informal discussions with Sternenko, Hanul, and Kozhukhar. See the Right Sector Odesa Facebook page for a recent (August 2019) account, with photos, of such a raid (<https://www.facebook.com/305040893018779/posts/1145925828930277?sfns=mo>).

⁵⁶ Author’s interview, October 2017.

Restoring justice for the benefit of citizens implies a broad repertoire of actions. Vigilantes' methods range, indeed, from official requests to state institutions (National Police, Security Service of Ukraine, Prosecutor General) to phone calls or "courtesy visits" paid to state officials, judges, or entrepreneurs in order to discuss cases with them in friendly, assertive, or even threatening ways. With the exception of written requests, most of these interventions rely on acts of force or threatened force, and the paramilitary attire that vigilantes wear, their strong and imposing build, the possession of a pneumatic firearms that their clothes may incidentally reveal are there to convey the seriousness of their intentions. The use of physical violence per se remains, however, limited; even so, vigilantes' interventions may occasionally turn into violent brawls, especially when owners of a visited business or occupants of an office summon private security or the police to fight back.

Examples of vigilantes defending the cause of ordinary people are numerous in social and mainstream media. Following a noise complaint by local residents against a brothel in the city center, National Corps activists broke violently into the premises one night in August 2016, filmed the place and its clientele, and referred the case to police investigators.⁵⁷ Similar grievances of residents against the wine bar Port, located on Zhukovskoho Street and open late at night, led vigilantes from RHB to fix the problem in September 2017: their attempt to discuss the situation with the owners ended up, however, in a violent brawl.⁵⁸

In June 2017 AutoMaidan and Self-Defense paid a visit to Vasylivka, Biliaieivs'kyi District, in the central part of Odesa Oblast, to support locals who mobilized against the production of chemicals under the brand KhimTrade at the site of a former repair workshop located in the village. They arrived there in large numbers, argued forcefully with the representatives of the company, and threatened them with more violent actions—18 months before, in February 2016, vigilantes from AutoMaidan had broken into the premises of the workshop and beat up its guards—as a warning against resuming the production of chemicals in the village.⁵⁹

In 2017 the National Corps fought for several months against the construction company Kadorr Group, owned by the businessman Adnan Kivan, and its construction project at 16A Kamanina Street. Together with residents of neighboring areas vigilantes tried to get construction works stopped, as they were apparently in breach of fire safety codes. On July 10 vigilantes tried to physically break into the site and

⁵⁷ See "TsK 'Azov' Odesa zdiisnyv reid na 'bordel';" Natsional'nyi Korpus Odesa, posted August 2, 2016. Video, 5:11. <https://youtu.be/Cplv2QhLmyA>.

⁵⁸ For more details, see "Aktivisty-'evromaidanovtsy' ustroili pogrom v bare na Deribasovskoi," *Timer-Odesa*, September 29, 2017. http://timer-odessa.net/news/aktivisti_evromaydanovtsi_ustroili_pogrom_v_bare_na_deribasovskoy_220.html.

⁵⁹ For more details, see "Odin iz odesskikh 'Avtomaidanov' zakhvatyvaet zavod v Beliaevskom raione," *Timer-Odesa*, May 11, 2017. http://timer-odessa.net/news/odin_iz_odesskikh_avtomaydanov_zahvativayut_zavod_v_belyaevskom_rayone_740.html. See also "V Odesskoi oblasti – konflikt iz-za predpriiatii, zanimaiushchegosia avtokhimiei: Ekologiya, podzhogi i izbieniia (foto, video, dokumenty)," *Dumskaya*, May 20, 2017. <https://dumskaya.net/news/konflikt-v-vasilevke-kak-nesmotrya-na-blokadu-me-072583/>.

clashed violently with the security service of Kadorr Group, as well as with the police who were called to the spot.⁶⁰ A month later the National Corps staged a number of direct actions in front of the building of Odesa's regional Prosecutor General's bureau, denouncing Adnan Kivan's Syrian origin—they are against foreigners running local businesses—and asking the bureau to investigate the case.

Last but not least, in April 2017 Self-Defense tried to defend the right of a young single mother of seven children to decent accommodation in the village of Kryzhanivka, a residential suburb of Odesa on the Black Sea coast. A group of ten men in military attire broke in and occupied the meeting room of the local council, put mattresses on the floor, and settled the family there, declaring that they would remain on the premises until the problem was solved.⁶¹ Five months later they ceased occupying the administrative building and left the village, despite failing to secure housing for the family.

While being framed as justice making in the public interest or to guarantee citizens' rights, these vigilantes' practices may also generate financial rewards and thus become a source of revenue. Distinguishing between a disinterested vigilantes' mission, on the one hand, and services rendered for payment on a more or less formal contractual basis, on the other, is extremely difficult, especially as some vigilante groups overlap with the private security companies they run, as in the case of Self-Defense's Admiral or AutoMaidan's Varta Mista. While defending the cause of a citizen or a group of citizens, vigilantes may at the same be doing jobs they were commissioned and paid for. As a result, vigilantism ends up utterly blurring the line between the public and the private, between proclaimed disinterest and personal interestedness, which is frequently exposed through journalists' accounts or denunciations by former affiliates who have quit their groups.

A violent brawl provoked by vigilantes from RHB near the wine bar Port is thus suspected to have been collateral damage from the group's involvement in extortion of funds from local businesses in exchange for protection services.⁶² The intervention in the village of Vasylivka in defense of local residents and their environmental rights by Self-Defense and AutoMaidan⁶³ or the National Corps's struggle with Kadorr Group and its developer and construction project on Kamanina Street⁶⁴ are both presumed by vigilantes' critics to have been corporate attacks against rival businesses. The head of Kryzhanivka village council Nataliia Krupitsa and local activists claim that the five-month occupation by Self-Defense of the council building was not re-

⁶⁰ See "Na Kamanina mestnye zhiteli vystupili protiv stroitel'stva ocherednoi vysotki 'Kadorr,'" *Pervyi Gorodskoi Odessa*, posted July 10, 2017. Video, 2:50. <https://youtu.be/mnoIrQq3urs>.

⁶¹ Author's interview with the head of Kryzhanivka council, Nataliia Krupitsa, May 2018.

⁶² For more details, see "Aktivisty-'evromaidanovtsy' ustroili pogrom v bare na Deribasovskoi," *Timer-Odessa*, September 29, 2017. http://timer-odessa.net/news/aktivisti_evromaydanovtsi_ustroili_pogrom_v_bare_na_deribasovskoy_220.html.

⁶³ See "Prybutkova sprava: Iak psevdoaktyvisty neschadno zarobliaiut' na ukraïntsiakh," 24 Kanal, posted November 8, 2018. Video, 21:19. <https://youtu.be/65ssxaCv2Xo>.

⁶⁴ Informal discussions with Vera Zaporozhets, local independent journalist and activist, October 2017.

ally meant to protect the single mother's right to housing, but was in fact a more profit-oriented strategy intended to force the council to allocate parcels of land on the seafront to a local luxury real estate developer.⁶⁵

THE COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VIGILANTES AND ODESA'S RULING ELITES

The relationship with Odesa's ruling elites—Mayor Trukhanov and the business groups behind him—has divided the vigilante milieu into two broad coalitions. The first one—Self-Defense, AutoMaidan, and RHB—seems to be integrated into ruling elite networks and engaged in exchanges of services with them. The second coalition—the Right Sector, the National Corps, the Street Front, the Concerned, and some other groups—claims to be in direct confrontation with these elites and denounces their grip on Odesa and, as a consequence, the privatization of state institutions like the city council and city hall, Odesa regional police, and Prosecutor General's bureaus. It is always difficult to define concretely the contours of relations between vigilantes and elite groups, especially when it comes to shedding light on the exchange of services or other questionable transactions. More or less direct evidence, such as the cooptation of vigilante representatives to official positions, cover-ups of vigilante groups' activities by the police or delegation to them of "dirty work," public controversies about the motivations behind vigilantism, and, finally, my own field observations are the rare elements that may be mobilized here.

ODESA'S ELITE-VIGILANTE NETWORKS

A privileged partnership between Self-Defense, AutoMaidan, RHB, and Mayor Trukhanov's team seems to have emerged in 2014–2015. Andrii Kotliar, a founding member of Self-Defense, was hired by the mayor's office in June 2015 and given the position of deputy mayor in charge of security issues, after having served for about a year as the head of the department of cooperation with law-enforcement agencies at the Odesa regional administration. According to local journalists and former affiliates of Self-Defense, it is through him that transactions between vigilante groups and the mayor are made.⁶⁶ Self-Defense representative Vitalii Kozhukhar half-heartedly recognizes cooperation with the mayor's office through Kotliar:

We are accused of supporting Trukhanov. Indeed, our close collaborator, Andrii Kotliar, is his deputy. He is a veteran of the Soviet war in Afghanistan and a member of Self-Defense on Maidan in Kyiv. For us, Kotliar is a way to keep an eye on the mayor. Thanks to him, Self-Defense works hand in hand with the citizens' security department of the city hall. It's within this department that a municipal security company, Munitsypal'na Varta [Municipal Guard], has been set up and some of our colleagues joined this new structure. In spite of his staged patriotism, Trukhanov remains half separatist, nostalgic for the Soviet Union. In

⁶⁵ Author's interview, May 2018.

⁶⁶ Interviews with Gleb Zhavoronkov (October 2015) and Vera Zaporozhets (May 2016).

the past, he headed the security company Captain [owned by] Odesa's most powerful criminal Aleksandr Angert. But Andrii Kotliar helps us to pass on our interests to this mayor and to direct his actions in the right direction.⁶⁷

A founding member of RHB, Ruslan Forostiak was co-opted at the beginning of 2017 to the position of adviser to the chief of Odesa's regional police bureau. Although he denies any current relationship with vigilantes and criticizes them for their actions in his official declarations and on his Facebook page, the police seem to be particularly tolerant of their deeds and even cover them up. If several administrative and criminal proceedings have been launched since 2015 against vigilantes of the first coalition, such as Mark Gordienko from RHB, Evhen Rezvushkin from AutoMaidan, and some leading members of Self-Defense, none of these proceedings have been concluded.

The police did not intervene in April–October 2017 to dislodge Self-Defense members from the premises of the village council in Kryzhanivka even though it was a physical occupation of a public building by paramilitaries and evoked the events of spring 2014, when paramilitary groups seized public administration buildings in Donetsk and Luhans'k, precipitating their separation from Kyiv. Nataliia Krupitsa, the head of the Kryzhanivka village council, denounced police inaction:

When we called the police, they just stood back. They did not intervene, while armed and dressed in military camouflage men had broken into the premises of the village council. We filed complaints with the chief of Odesa' regional police, with the SBU, with the regional council, alerting them to the fact that a state building had been occupied. We met with the deputy head of Odesa's regional police; he told us, "But what can we do? We cannot throw the occupiers out?" He even made a phone call to one of the occupiers and asked him, "So, how long are you going to stay there?"⁶⁸ He promised to send a group of criminal police investigators, but no one came. Ruslan Forostiak also paid a visit to Kryzhanivka, reassured us that the police were following the case closely, reassured us that the case would be settled soon. But the occupation lasted for months more.⁶⁹

Finally, the mayoral office seems to delegate "dirty work" to the three vigilante groups. In April 2016 Self-Defense, AutoMaidan, and RHB participated in a violent dispersal of an anti-Trukhanov protest on the square in front of the city hall. Vigilantes from AutoMaidan were also spotted at protests held near the city hall on September 20, 2017, over the deaths of three children in a fire at a children's camp and against corrupt municipal officials who turned a blind eye to violations of fire safety

⁶⁷ Author's interview, May 2016.

⁶⁸ On numerous occasions I myself witnessed informal interactions between the police and vigilantes. For example, on May 2, 2016, while I was having a conversation with RHB leader Mark Gordienko, he received a call from the police in charge of law enforcement during the May 2 commemoration with a request to remove his vigilantes from one of the places where these ceremonies were to be held and to restrain them from any forceful actions.

⁶⁹ Author's interview, May 2018.

procedures in the camp. AutoMaidan helped the police and Municipal Guard troops to physically block the access of angry parents and local activists, including vigilantes of the second coalition, to the city hall and the mayor's office.⁷⁰ AutoMaidan seems to be the most effective collaborator with Odesa's mayor as its leader Evhen Rezvushkin, together with his colleagues, was present in the audience at Mayor Trukhanov's corruption and embezzlement trial in Kyiv in February 2018. They physically occupied the visitors' gallery to impede journalists and anticorruption activists from entering the premises. They also took part in scuffles outside the court with the police and Kyiv-based vigilante groups that came to challenge the mayor and demand his arrest.

The three groups are also involved—as vigilantes or private security companies, the boundaries between these groups being thin—in defending the private interests of close business associates of Trukhanov. These missions sometimes bring them into physical confrontations with their counterparts from the second vigilante coalition. For example, when in April 20, 2017, anticorruption activists, together with the National Corps, the Right Sector, and the Street Front, came to dismantle an illegal construction site on Otrada Beach, they found that AutoMaidan and RHB affiliates had posted guards at the site. The two camps then clashed over the issue.

THE CONFLICTUAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VIGILANTES AND RULING ELITES

Vigilantes from the Right Sector, the National Corps, the Street Front, and the Concerned position themselves in direct opposition to Mayor Trukhanov and his close political and business circles. They condemn these power elites' firm hold on the city and their inclination to run it like their fiefdom. And indeed, Trukhanov's political party Trust in Deeds, together with the former President Petro Porochenko's political party which supports the mayor, has a majority on the city council, which allows it to pass all decisions easily, including urban planning and long-term land leases on the seafront or in the city center. In close cooperation with anticorruption and ecology activists, vigilantes from this coalition endeavor to stop unwanted development in Odesa carried out in the interests of Trukhanov and his business partners. Their mobilization over the issue seems to be the origin of violent attacks on several activists, including Serhii Sternenکو from the Concerned, throughout 2017–2018.⁷¹

A mobilization in defense of the Summer Theater, an open-air theater in the city garden in the very heart of Odesa, is the best-known example here. In 2016 the city council granted a 49-year-long lease over this part of the historical center to a private company belonging to Volodymyr Galanternyk, a property developer and business associate of Trukhanov. According to the development plan, a new shopping and leisure center would be built there. In November 2017, when activists knew that the

⁷⁰ See Sergei Sarafaniuk, "Lager' smerti ili budet krasivo!?" *Dumskaia*, September 20, 2017. <https://dumskaya.net/post/lager-smerti-ili-budet-krasivo/author/>.

⁷¹ Oksana Grytsenko and Konstyantyn Chernichkin, "Odesa Activists Blame Trukhanov for Attacks," *Kyiv Post*, November 2, 2018. <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/odesa-activists-blame-trukhanov-for-attacks.html>.

city employees were clearing trees for the construction, they gathered in front of the gates of the Summer Theater, which had been closed and cordoned off by police (Bezruk 2019). When the most determined tried to force open the passage to the theater, violent scuffles with the police broke out, both sides spraying one another with tear gas. As a result, several vigilantes, including Dem'ian Hanul and Serhii Sternenko, were arrested and charged with offenses of hindering the police and involvement in mass disorder. Although both were released after a short period in custody, they are still under criminal investigation over the issue.

The example above also provides a sense of the tense relations between the police and the second coalition of vigilantes. The two sides regularly encounter each other in violent scuffles, especially when the police intervene in vigilantes' antidevelopment actions. Police deployment around allegedly illegal construction sites and police actions against vigilantes reinforce the vigilantes' belief in an active connivance between Odesa's ruling elites and law-enforcement agencies. It also contributes to legitimizing vigilantes' views of the police as being biased, tasked with defending the private interests of Trukhanov and his business associates, and pressuring actors involved in the promotion of the public good.

This confrontational relationship does not however preclude occasional cooperation. Indeed, vigilantes of the second coalition coordinate their efforts with the police prior to anniversaries of the May 2 events. Between 2015 and 2017 they took part in meetings held in late April at Odesa's regional police bureau in order to discuss strategies for maintaining order in the streets on May 2 and even work out a "division of labor" between themselves and the police.⁷² Thus, in May 2015 and 2016 all vigilante groups patrolled the streets alongside the police. But a year later only state law-enforcement agencies were tasked with patrolling the streets, while the Right Sector, the National Corps, the Street Front, and the Concerned focused more on unofficial monitoring of the gathering at Kulykove Pole Square. This reflects a progressive redistribution of violence to the advantage of the state and its claim for monopoly over law enforcement, while still leaving vigilantes, as we have seen, a large margin for maneuver in other areas.

CONCLUSION

This analysis of vigilantism in Odesa explains the development of this phenomenon during Maidan protests and, later on, during the war in Donbas. It shows that vigilantism in Odesa has attracted mainly four social types (businessmen, former combatants or security officers, members of far-right groups, and young people), relies on force-based actions, and implies an intense socialization of vigilantes' bodies into the use of violence. Vigilantism also operates through three social roles: first, national community guards claiming to defend Ukraine against its enemies—external (Russia and Russian proxies in Ukraine) and internal (disloyal Ukrainians, pro-Russian parties, corrupt state officials or judges); second, patrolling agents, performing

⁷² Author's interview with Ruslan Forostiak, advisor to the Odesa regional police bureau, October 2017; author's interviews with vigilantes from different groups, May 2015 and May 2016.

different state-like actions and negotiating state functions; and third, of justice makers in the interests of ordinary citizens, even if disinterested promotion of public good (security, order, justice) by vigilantes sometimes turns out to be for the benefit of private interests. In the search for resources and protection, some Odesa vigilante groups (Self-Defense, AutoMaidan, and RHB) have, indeed, integrated with elite networks headed by Mayor Trukhanov and are engaged in exchanges of services with them. Other groups (the Right Sector, the National Corps, the Street Front, the Concerned) contest the private use of the state by these elites and situate themselves in direct opposition to them.

Finally, this analysis sheds light on the complex interplay between vigilantism, on the one hand, and the particular structural context of the ongoing war in Donbas with consequential redeployment of the Ukrainian state and redefinition of socially dominant positions, legitimacies, valuable resources, and the general distribution of violence between state and nonstate actors, on the other. The war gives vigilantes new *raison d'être*, makes their paramilitary resources particularly valuable, and enhances the legitimacy of vigilantism far from the frontlines as a necessary and acceptable response to the armed conflict and its multiple and hybrid threats. The wide social recognition of vigilantes by different authorities (state institutions, ruling elites, civil society groups, ordinary citizens) does not, however, exclude controversies around vigilantism in Ukrainian public sphere. Consequently, questions about the legality of its repertoires of action, its real motivations, and the challenges it represents for the Ukrainian state and its capacity to manage violence remain a matter of debate.

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НА ЗАЩИТЕ УКРАИНЫ В ТЫЛУ ВООРУЖЕННОГО КОНФЛИКТА НА ДОНБАССЕ: ВИГИЛАНТИЗМ ВОЕННОГО ВРЕМЕНИ В ОДЕССЕ (2014–2018 ГОДЫ)

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В статье анализируется феномен вигилантизма в Одессе в тылу вооруженного конфликта на Донбассе и в контексте радикальной реконфигурации украинского государства и перераспределения права на насилие между государственными и негосударственными акторами. Статья состоит из трех частей. В первой части, посвященной социологическому анализу сообщества вигилантов и социального происхождения членов данных групп, утверждается, что вигилантизм привлек в Одессе четыре социальных профиля (бизнесмены, бывшие комбатанты или сотрудники силовых структур, крайне правые и молодежь); вигилантизм основывается на силовых действиях и предполагает интенсивную социализацию физических тел вигилантов в использование оружия и единоборства. Во второй части представлены три основные социальные роли вигилантизма (защитники национального сообщества, патрульные и вершители правосудия) и соответствующие им практики. Автор также утверждает, что за бескорыстным продвижением вигилантами общественных благ (безопасность, порядок, правосудие) иногда стоит простое удовлетворение частных интересов. В третьей части исследуются сложные взаимоотношения между группами вигилантов и местными политическими и экономическими элитами от многочисленных обменов услугами до фронтальной конфронтации. Наконец, автор утверждает, что продолжающаяся война на Донбассе повышает ценность парамилитарных навыков и ресурсов вигилантов и способствует общественному признанию вигилантизма как социально необходимого и приемлемого ответа на вооруженный конфликт и его гибридные угрозы, что, однако, не исключает публичных контroversийных дискуссий относительно вызовов, которые данный феномен представляет для украинского государства. Работа базируется на антропологических исследованиях, посвященных вигилантизму, литературе по социологии насилия и социологии критических ситуаций (политические кризисы, революции, гражданские войны), а также на сочетании первичных этнографических исследований и вторичных материалов.

Ключевые слова: вигилантизм; социология насилия; война на Донбассе; Одесса; Украина