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Exploring Ukrainian Diaspora's Experience of Agency within the Context of the Ukraine Crisis

In the mainstream research on the Ukraine crisis, the effort made by Ukrainian diaspora to preserve Ukraine's territorial integrity often tends to be occluded. Yet, the crisis is likely to have been a source of major transformation both within and beyond the country's borders. While some suggestions have been made regarding how diaspora can help Ukraine, revealingly little is known about its actual experience as a political agent. This study analyses the way in which the Ukrainian diaspora in the UK reflects on its agency within the context of the Ukraine crisis. The study derives its data from three focus groups and participant observation conducted between April-June 2017. Combining realist and social constructionist approaches, the focus is not only on the diaspora's practical contribution, but also its collective construction of experiential meaning. In discussing the question of agency, what matters is its capacity to make a difference, as the sense of powerlessness can significantly disincentivise future activism. Will the diaspora continue the path of political agency beyond the current context? The results show that powerlessness has also been part of its experience. At the same time, a promising sign is that the diaspora's experience is significantly more complex, as illustrated by the presence of several diverging narratives that deserve stronger scrutiny. The paper concludes that a lot depends on the diaspora's ability to construct the right narrative of agency capable of combating the internal discourse of powerlessness.